

100 Rooms

*Painting as a Means of Phenomenological
Investigation of Being-there*



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Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work. The material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this, or any other university. This thesis does not exceed the maximum permitted word length of 80,000 words including appendices and footnotes, but excluding the bibliography.

YunChu Chang

Abstract

I use oil painting portraits as a method to explore how we understand ourselves and others in our daily life through the theories of Heidegger and Taoism. Fifty-five students from twenty countries at Lancaster University were involved in this study which took an anthropological ethnographic fieldwork approach. I went into their rooms and met face-to-face to record their life stories and create portraits. Through my research, I found that this in-person art-making process can generate powerful emotional connections beyond words, eliminate stereotypes and racial discrimination. This artistic process is an “in-between” that can connect technology and humanity. The awareness of this “in-between” combined with the method of art-making provides not only a theoretical visualisation, but a powerful tool for ongoing investigation of racial, class and cultural diversity.

Key words: Heidegger, Taoism, phenomenology, oil painting portraiture, ethnography, in-between.

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Chapter 1

Introduction - Body, Space and Time

This dissertation is centred around the fifty-five oil portraits produced over the course of the research project. These large scale artworks are of various dimensions, of a least 1m×1m, and each was painted in-person by carrying my canvas and dragging a suitcase full of paints into each sitter's personal room. I think through this in-person process, of creating a work of art in tandem with the subject and capturing a specific moment in time, the purpose of art is revealed. Through the three elements of Body, Space and Time included in the process of creating works of art, I locate the reality reflected by works of art – how human beings exist in the world. I want to truly understand a person and their life. Ultimately, the question I really want to ask is, what is the basis of contemporary people's existence in art and philosophy? To do this, I use art as a tool to understand this person in the particular time and space where we meet. These art

works can be described as ‘aimless’, as I do not start with a pre-conceived idea of the final product; I paint that moment, in the moment. I use this kind of aimless artistic activity to depict the depths of human life and existence. The gap between the romantic idea that a person can exist without any specific reason, and the reality of modern life where we are constantly placing a value on individuals, is bridged through art. If we can learn something about the world through another individual, no matter how negative or discouraging they may be, this establishes our basic harmonious relationship with the world.

My dissertation is divided into three parts: Body, Space and Time. This exploration of existence through artistic activities begins with the body in daily life and ends with time. In the first section, I utilise the method of phenomenology to describe the body, including both the body of the artist and the body of the sitters I see during this creative act. Throughout this dynamic creative process, I observe the bodies of sitters and myself and how our bodies are disciplined and perceived in the living world.

In particular, I use my artworks to analyse the meaning of skin colour from the perspective of decolonisation, and my personal perspective as a ‘yellow’ Asian woman. In the first part of this study, I further analyse the relationship between the body in everyday life and the ‘reality’ in the work of art. The lives of these sitters seem arbitrary and incomprehensible, but their styles of life are, in a sense, akin to a rational law approaching the truth. This is what Martin Heidegger calls ‘the rupture’, and what Immanuel Kant calls ‘the third way’ between subjective sensibility and strict understanding (Kant, 1781, cited in Heidegger, 1968).

Before the Body thinks, it is an organism with an instinctive experience of the

world. This is the basic physicality of our 'being-in-the-world'. After observing a body, I see the background the body is situated within. In the second part of the dissertation, concerning Space, I discuss the relationship between sitters and space, and the relationship between artists and space, respectively. This includes physical space, screen space and cyberspace. Using the private space of my sitters' rooms as the source of my thinking, I then locate the world we intuitively live in, plus its real entities, through Heidegger's 'fourfold' and Taoist Feng Shui space theory. Throughout the creative process, where the sitter and I are constantly moving in this ever-flowing space and where all elements echo and reflect each other, each horizon we explore opens up new horizons. As Edmund Husserl (2001, p.170) said, 'This endless whole, in its perpetual flow, all points to a unified meaning, but this does not mean that we can grasp and understand the whole in this way.' The abstraction involved in this process creates anxiety for those who generally embrace individualism in the contemporary era. Through my artwork, I try to address this, depicting the unity of cyberspace with black wires running through each individual space, without compromising the uniqueness of each space. An abstract totality exists within the flesh-and-blood living space of each sitter. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel mentioned in *The Philosophy of Fine Art* that "Now it is just the show and deception of this false and evanescent world which art disengages from the veritable significance of phenomena to which we have referred, implanting in the same a reality of more exalted rank born of mind. The phenomena of art therefore are not merely appearance and nothing more and we are justified in ascribing to them, as contrasted with the realities of our ordinary life, a higher reality and more veritable existence (Hegel, 1920, pp.10-11)."

In a space, any object that enters our field of vision is in the context of a certain

world, and we vaguely feel a set of intertwined functions and positions. The question that I will try to explore is where and how do we exist in the context of this world? The first two sections of this work cover the visible elements of this discussion, before the final part moves on to the invisible component, the impact of time.

In this world, the temporality of objects is both a constituent of being and invisible. Each one of my works took anywhere from one hour to three hours to complete, depending on the size. Each was completed on site and was not modified retrospectively. This physical time is an important aspect of my creative process. These fluid moments of time are then frozen in my artworks, showing their true nature.

The discussion of time focusses on the necessity and uniqueness of the moment when I enter a private room, and how I use art to freeze this special moment. In this part of my dissertation, I analyse the temporal cross-section of my contacts with sitters using the time theories of Heidegger, Bernard Stiegler and Yuk Hui. Their theories are all concerned with the humanities, technology and art and propose a thinking about human existence that breaks the Eurocentric theory. Their three theories have evolved over time, and this network of flowing relationships and perspective points in my artwork goes right to the core of these theories, providing a structural framework that enables us to identify and understand sitters. A sitter represents a picture and a life story, and does not just exist as a sitter. If we are to understand any fragment of their story, it must be placed within its complex web. While the portraits produced in the course of my artistic activities seem to describe the sitter, in fact they describe people's relationships with the world which sheds light on how we exist in contemporary time. It is 'being-in-the-world' which, as a form of being, necessarily points to other things;

and it is the ‘bound-upness’ of this with things that makes things manifest themselves.

Heidegger (1985, p.109), in his discussion of Friedrich Schelling’s ideas, asserts, “We must let what is in front of us appear as it is, in its own position and value [...] We must make what we encounter free to keep its own way; the same is true of our own qualities”. Art, in this sense, is not only a subjective experience (vulnerable to illusion and manipulation), but carries an objective organic logic that “brings a whole man” instead of “the fraction of a man”, the one and all (1985, p.109).

On the whole, this research uses Heidegger’s phenomenological theoretical framework for these fifty-five works of art, from subject to space, and from space to time, to explore the meaning of existence contained in the moment of artistic creation. I start with the theory of consciousness discussed by Husserl when he was teaching in Göttingen University, to explain the process of the creation of artworks, and explain that the existence of artworks must be manifested through the changes of time and space. Then I explore the relationship between man and space through the spatial theories of Heidegger and Taoism. Finally, the moment of thinking about the creation of artworks from the theory of time reveals the meaning of personal existence. People are thrown into this world for no reason and are destined to die; but Heidegger considers that people, as *Dasein*, are not only controlled by time, but defined by the existence of time. In his space theory, Heidegger once again presents the idea that although people are mortal, through building their habitats, people determine their existence as mortal (*die Sterblichen*). In the end, Heidegger takes the ‘fourfold’ as the ultimate meaning of dwelling, when a mortal person can achieve an understanding of everything in the ‘releasement’ (*Gelassenheit*). I try to explore the relationship between the meaning

of my artwork and the positioning of human existence that my artistic method can uncover. In terms of artwork and the process of creating artwork, I attempt to show how people exist within a specific space and time.

Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 The art practice process approach

Since this project originated in 2015, when I entered my first sitter's room to make *Room Project 1* [Fig. 2.1], entering other people's rooms and listening to their life stories has become my way of creating. I am full of curiosity about the individual 'human'. I want to know what constitutes the 'human' creature. How do external conditions, such as money, status, culture and values, shape a 'person'? How can such a person be expressed in painting? How do people exist in their space? My previous research projects, *Travel Project* (2009-2014) [Fig. 2.2] and *Naked Project* (2015) [Fig. 2.3], were both dedicated to drawing strangers in public spaces, but neither of these projects could answer these questions. At the time, I had a strong interest in people who exist in largely transitory public spaces. When the girl from *Room Project 1* invited



Figure 2.1: YunChu Chang, *Room Project 1*, 2015, oil on canvas, 150×150cm.

me into her room, it was the first time I had moved a real-scale canvas into someone's private space. The girl's comfort and relaxation in her room shocked me. Compared with her well-dressed image in public places, I was now presented with more clues to 'evaluate' her through her room decoration. In this room, we also had a more private conversation, and I got a step closer to understanding her as a 'person'. She lives in this room; she walks around her room, sleeps, and sings; she had painted the walls in her favourite lavender. The space of her room accommodates her, and this space is part of her person. The differing postures of human beings in different spaces capture my

interest. People behave differently in different spaces, and people and the environment have always been in a relationship of mutual influence. Throughout this entire project, I have used a total of six different canvas sizes (200×100cm, 200×80cm, 100×100cm, 180×120cm, 155×150cm, 150×65cm). Before each painting, I would pick a canvas size at random, tie it to the roof of a car and drive it to sitter's house. If it was within walking distance, I would walk to sitter's house with a canvas which was always taller than me, often lifting up in the wind and falling onto the ground. There are traces of these falls and the canvas dragging on the ground, in the form of footprints, mud and fallen leaves, on my paintings. I packed all of my paints, brushes and newspaper into one suitcase along with my voice recorder. These are all the things I needed to complete each portrait for this project. Every time I finished a work, I would remove the canvas and staple it to the wall to dry, before stapling a new canvas to the empty frame. My canvases were cotton or linen based and, before painting, I would first apply a layer of rabbit skin glue and, subsequently, a layer of gesso. After both coats had dried, the canvas would be ready for the application of oil paint.

My sitters were all students at Lancaster University, many from the Swing Dancing Society. I was familiar with some of them beforehand, but not all. In all cases, my visit to complete the painting was the first time I had entered their bedroom. Occasionally, my canvas was too big to move into their room and the sitting would have to be rearranged. After a couple of enforced cancellations, I was always sure to prepare an extra, smaller (80×50 cm), canvas just in case.

There are several reasons behind my choice of relatively large size canvases. First of all, I wanted to record the most ordinary people on the scale of historical paintings,



Figure 2.2: YunChu Chang, *Travel Project- Big Mama*, 2013, oil on canvas, 200×200cm, Private collection.



Figure 2.3: YunChu Chang, *Naked Project*, 2015, 200×150cm.

presenting the important existence in these simple lives. Secondly, I am obsessed with the large movements of my body that are incorporated into each brush stroke when creating my artworks, which is explained in more depth in the chapter on “Body”.

I always wanted the sitters to move freely while I was painting. I wanted to be able to ‘truly’ present them as they are in their living space. I never moved their room furnishings or directed them into specific movements or poses. While I was painting, we would move together and cooperate with each other. I tried not to interfere with the sitters’ state as much as possible, but still did in some ways. I still made choices with regards to the angle and composition I preferred. The sitters also often made their own choices, for example, in the work *Edwin Reynolds* [Fig. 2.4], he chose a teddy bear to be painted with him. Some of the sitters wore jewellery, and one of the sitters chose his favourite window as a backdrop. I think the composition of these paintings provide pieces of the lived world, and through this project, a little bit of truth can be revealed.

What every room featured in the project had in common was the presence of technology and, upon the conclusion of our interview, almost every sitter would instinctively enter ‘cyberspace’. Every time I was painting, I felt a technological ‘alienation’. I was in the same room with the sitter, but we were in different spaces and the object I was drawing would disappear. The relationship between the science and technology space and human beings is a popular topic of discussion now, but I have not seen painting used as a basis to explore this problem, and such a topic lacks a lot of new field data. Faced with such a double shortfall, this thesis attempts to propose a new theoretical framework, based on my fieldwork of painting, to present and interpret



Figure 2.4: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Edwin Reynolds*, 2018, oil on canvas.

the meaning of subjectivity and identity in private space and cyberspace.

2.2 The coordinates of painting style in art history

For the paintings in this study, my main techniques and concepts were influenced by Russian realism, Courbet's realism, Impressionist techniques, and Lucian Freud's artistic concepts. I am fascinated by the concept of realism, and I strive to uncover the truth and existential anxiety that can be found beneath figurative portraits. In

the visual arts and literature, realism was a 19th century movement that originated in France. Rising in Europe in the 19th century, it was also known as the realistic painting school. Whether facing a real object or an imagined object, the painter is always describing a concretely existing substance rather than an abstract symbol. Such a phenomenological description can properly convey the production process and ideas of my artworks. In the following, I will discuss these influencing movements in chronological order, starting with the concept of Russian realism.

In 1855, N. G. Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) proposed *Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality* (Chernyshevsky, 2015) which raised the profile of the aesthetics of realism and sparked a profound shift in the attitude towards painting at the time. Artists at this time moved away from the prevalent Russian classicism, and turned to the social philosophy of D. I. Pisarev (1840-1868), adhering to Chernyshevsky's materialist aesthetics. They believed that beauty was in living reality, not in empty ideals and that the artist's role was to portray real life, not to produce "art for art's sake" (Si, 1990). The themes of these artists' paintings often featured the description of the middle and lower classes and rural life. This trend away from traditional official art, almost exclusively featuring noble and aristocratic subjects, not only led to an expansion of the creative horizons of the time, but additionally looked to improve the understanding of and engagement with art for peasants and labourers, narrowing the distinction between classes.

My painting teacher in Taiwan, Zhong Dunhao, was the first Taiwanese student to graduate from Russia's Imperial Academy of Arts. Under the instruction of Mr. Zhong, I practiced art anatomy, dynamic sketching, outdoor sketching and indoor oil painting

for more than 30 hours a week for ten consecutive years. I consciously chose to focus on improving my ability to portray characters through this training. This training also laid the foundation of my ability to keep my mind still whilst painting. This ensures that I can thoroughly ‘see’ in the process of painting, and then reveal the living and life through portraits. The accumulation of these techniques has created a drawing database in my mind, which allows me to depict the human body without seeing it. This database also allows me to capture the fast-moving human body, obtaining a small amount of information from the object, but effectively creating an appealing image on a flat surface.

For my sketches, I think the knowledge of anatomy is an important ‘knowledge’. For the painting of concrete figures, it is more important to understand how the figures are constructed inside, than to describe what is visible on the surface. Anatomy is not just explaining musculoskeletal formation. More importantly, it is understanding the structure, centre of gravity, body mass and appearance, starting from the forehead, travelling through the facial features, neck, clavicle, chest, abdomen, pelvis, legs, knees, ankles, calcaneus, soles, hands, toes, front and back. They all have unique and self-explanatory features. Considering the forehead, for example, if you can master the *tuber frontale*, which is a prominent part of the frontal bone of the skull, you can master the gender of the forehead of the character you create. The focus of artistic anatomy is a knowledge of internal structures and muscular movements that are not easily visible to the eyes.

With this in mind, an artwork cannot be completed by copying photographs. The artist must be familiar with the structure, dynamics and beauty of the human body.

What state are these human movements explaining? Such body posture and state can represent the atmosphere and emotion of the environment at that time. If you can study the lineal beauty, structural beauty, and dynamic beauty of the human body as the main goals during practice, then you can use the vocabulary of body art in depth. So studying the pattern of the human body is the most critical objective. A quick sketch (in the East we have different names for different sketches: a quick sketch is about ten to twenty minutes) is far more important than a sketch (that refers to works which have taken a long time or works without time restrictions). There are many types of sketch. In the Renaissance period, for example, sketching was a long-term process built up from multiple quick sketches capturing the body at a single moment and using extensive knowledge of anatomy. One of the most important aspects of completing a quick sketch is actually memory. I quickly grasp the dynamics of the characters, but with thousands of dynamics accumulated in my mind, I use memory if necessary to correct to the initial ideal image. More clear details will require the sitter to provide more depth. Therefore, when I was in the *100 Rooms*, my sitters were free to move around. A quick sketch is the most effective tool for grasping the dynamics and style of the human body. In addition, sketching is more inclined to show a knowledge of anatomy. However, it is no longer common to learn anatomy; we study emotional expression, proportions, colour scales, and levels. When there are concrete characters in the language of the picture, it will appear flat or twisted. While sometimes it is the artist who deliberately pursues this technique, in contemporary art, it is more often that the artist has lost the ability to draw from life and not from a photograph.

Secondly, Courbet's concept of realism also has an influence on my creation. Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) was a famous French painter and the founder of the realistic

painting school. He advocated that art should be based on reality and opposed the whitewashing of life. He is famous for stating that: “I can’t draw angels, because I have never seen them.” Realism abandons idealised imagination, and advocates careful observation of the appearance of things. In this way, realism in a broad sense includes many artistic trends from different civilisations. Painting is about painting objects, but it is also a kind of self-practice. There is no good or bad in self-practice. Others will see imperfect, incomplete works of art but this does not bother me. Painting is not a part of life, it is the whole of life. I treat my works in this way, and I also treat the objects I paint in the same way. I believe that if I paint them honestly, without concealing them, the subjects will also leave fragments of their soul in my work.

Thirdly, I use impressionist techniques in my works. If the Renaissance movement signalled the beginning of modern painting, establishing the application of scientific knowledge, such as light and shade (*chiaroscuro*), perspective and anatomy, to the visual arts; then the Impressionist movement marked a key point in the evolution modern painting, where artworks reached an additional level of completeness. The use of colour modelling introduced the scientific concept of light and colour into painting, revolutionising the traditional inherent concept of colour, with light and the environment now providing the core sources of colour. It also recognised the unique aesthetic value of art forms, carried out bold explorations in form, and laid the foundation for the emergence of contemporary art. I combine the working methods of Impressionism with an ethnographic approach to anthropology. I look at the subject face-to-face with each work, while applying oil paints directly on the canvas without the addition of extra oil. I use the change of paint to capture light and shadow and form concrete objects. It can be said that light forms a three-dimensional effect on the

picture. I sculpt the picture with thick paint and the light and brushstrokes present time.

Compared with traditional European classical art, Romanticism, represented by Delacroix, can be said to be the first revolutionary wave, and realism, represented by Courbet, the second wave. The Impressionist movement, represented by Monet, Pissarro and others, signified the third wave of this revolution. The Impressionists, while still opting for realism, brought to the audience a brand new visual viewing experience. After they carefully studied the traditional realistic painting rules, they found that the production of traditional art was based on a man-made concept. Classical painters had mostly been painted indoors, mainly relying on indoor light to produce *chiaroscuro* effects on objects and create the illusion of depth in their drawings. Although these paintings also have many subtle colour changes, this method always relies upon the inherent, as opposed to perceived, colour point of view to describe the object. Classical artists would use brown as the base of the canvas before colour as a glaze, and people have developed the habit of appreciating this kind of oil painting, so that few people have carefully studied what colour effects will be produced under external light.

The Impressionists re-examined the relationship between light and colour. After being inspired by the Barbizon School and British landscape painters' outdoor sketches, they were no longer restricted by traditional rules and dogmas. Impressionist painters boldly stepped out of the studio and created sketches in the face of nature. They seldom returned to the studio to reorganise after sketching outdoors, so that the works maintained the vividness of outdoor sketching. Based on the development of contemporary science, Impressionist painters understood the composition of light and

the relationship between light and colour, and relied on the observations of their own eyes to reproduce the visual impression caused by the light and colour of the object. In the last three decades of the 19th century this style became the mainstream of French art. My works also adopt this method when bringing the canvas into different people's rooms. Although they are indoors, most of them are affected by outdoor light. I also don't edit after leaving the sitters' room. In this way, I hope to preserve the time and atmosphere of the exact moment of creation.

Finally, the work of Lucian Freud (1922-2011) brought me to study in the UK. I think his works have the same metaphysical sense of time as Morandi. Unlike the Impressionists, Freud was essentially an interior painter. Almost all the observations of his subjects were performed inside the studio, and even paintings of horses were made inside the stables. In addition, his landscape paintings are the views from his studio window. He demanded that the model in each work be kept the same and the light source constant. This was very important to Freud. The portrait *Man With a Blue Scarf* [Fig. 2.5] uses electric lighting. The powerful light source comes from a spotlight mounted on the ceiling, positioned between Freud and the sitter. Freud took a long time and used constant light to try to paint the colours of life. But if the light changes continuously, it also means that the colour changes continuously. If the light source is not kept steady, prolonged painting is meaningless.

In two dimensional painting, a picture can only accommodate one light situation. If several different lights are accommodated at the same time, this implies different times at the same time. Some other painters have made such attempts, but this is not what Freud wants to show. Technically speaking, it is not feasible to try to capture light



Figure 2.5: Lucian Freud, *Man with Blue Scarf*, 2004, oil on canvas.

from several different times on a concrete thing, because light changes colour and colour shapes the body. If the light changes constantly and the colour changes constantly, then the shape cannot be established. Like Freud, my *100 Rooms* project is also performed indoors. Unlike Freud, each of my works is completed in about three hours. The light source of each work is different, sometimes it is white or yellow electric lighting, and sometimes there is sunlight from the window. The changes of sunlight will be according to the time of day, the weather and the seasons which all have different light. In *Kasia Tatys* [Fig. 2.6], you can see the afternoon sunlight gently resting on her. In *Sam Maesschalck* [Fig. 2.7] and *Katherine Dale* [Fig. 2.8], you can see that the cloudy back light makes the models' faces appear cold. I think this real-time performance gives me



Figure 2.6: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Kasia Tatys*, 2019, oil on canvas.



Figure 2.7: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Sam Maesschalck*, 2019, oil on canvas.

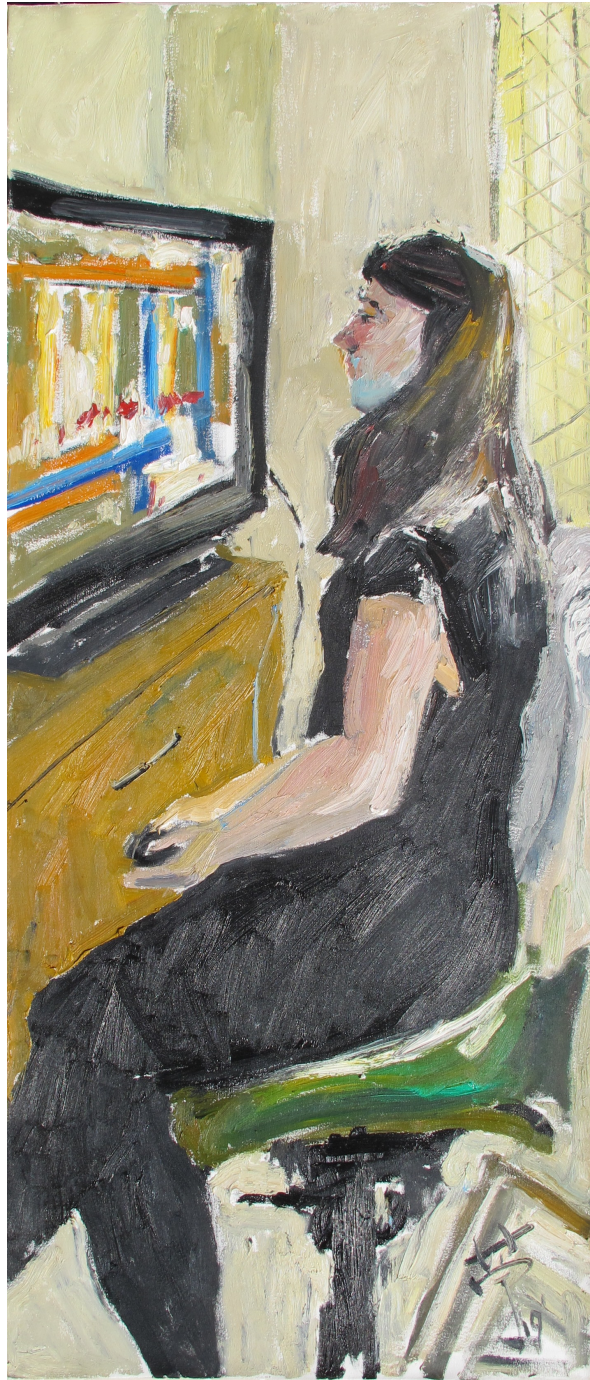


Figure 2.8: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Katherine Dale*, 2019, oil on canvas.

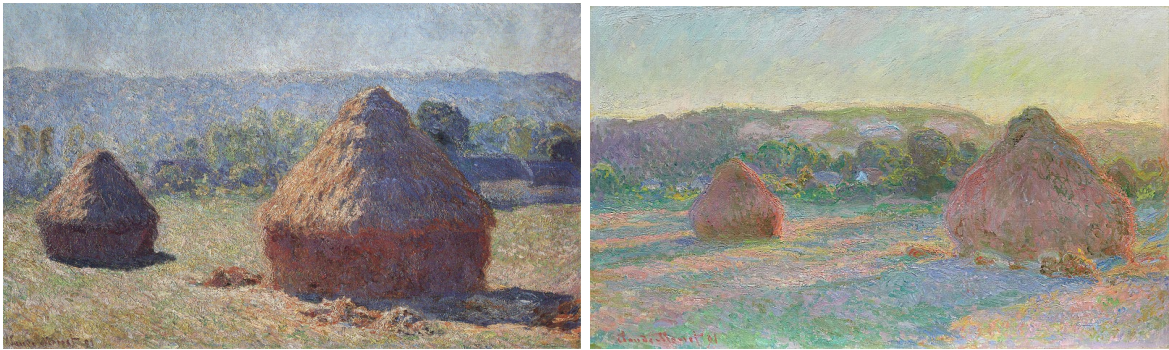


Figure 2.9: Oscar-Claude Monet, *Les Meules*, 1890-91, oil on canvas, 60cm×80cm, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

a better grasp of the temporal nature of space in my painting process.

Freud (2004, cited in Gayford, 2010, pp.95-96) said, “I decided that a layer of paint on the surface of a canvas is just the same as an object in the room. You know, the deliciousness of it, the thing that makes you love the painting, is a physical thing, the building up of layers.” During the painting process, the light and material intersect, and the material texture is complicated and interlaced on the canvas through the blending of pigments. In contrast, in Monet’s series of works *Les Meules* (1890-91) [Fig. 2.9] canvases faithfully and simply present the function of the carrier of light. *Les Meules* are Monet’s early works that illustrate nature’s differences in time, seasons and weather by repeating a theme. While all the same haystacks are painted on the surface, the underlying theme is the ever-changing light.

Gayford (2010, p.29) mentioned that Freud spent almost as much time choosing and blending paint as he did actually painting them on canvas; “When painting my face, khaki, dove grey, rose, and even lime green and lead grey were used.” From [Fig. 2.10] it can be inferred that Freud may tend to mix the colour palette and spend a long



Figure 2.10: Lucian Freud, *Reflection* (Self Portrait), 1985, oil on canvas, Private Collection, The Lucian Freud Archive/ Bridgeman Image.

time figuring out the appropriate colour. I mix colour directly on the canvas, selecting approximating colours on the palette, and using a brush to mix the colours on the canvas. I think this is a dynamic method to connect the colours. When I stack the pigments, there is a slight interlacing between one stroke and the next [Fig. 2.11].

The historical painting genres and artistic concepts discussed here have all influenced my own painting methods, techniques and artistic approach. I will next introduce and discuss my use of ethnographic tools from the field of anthropology, in order to supplement the production of my artwork and move closer to my ultimate goal of understanding a person's existence.



Figure 2.11: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Wauis Allen*, 2019, oil on canvas.

2.3 Anthropological ethnographic methods

In this research, I use anthropological theories and methods, using an anthropological perspective that focuses on social and cultural contexts. I also use fieldwork methods to collect and process experiential materials, and to create and reflect on artistic works. The application of anthropological methods in contemporary art is the result of reflection after post-colonialism, with globalisation allowing the decentralisation of artistic practices and opportunities for cross-cultural art scholars to contribute towards the ultimate goal of cultural equality. The intersection of art and anthropology is a long-standing important cultural and academic field. Before the publication of

Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* in 1871, William Powell Frith made extensive use of ethnographic phrenology, the study of the shape of the skull, to describe different social classes and races. He used drawings to express the relationship between individual appearance, social status and moral image. Physiognomy, the idea that one's character or personal characteristics can be seen in the body, particularly in the face, was another popular tool employed by artists of the time to distinguish people's class status in paintings.

However, this Victorian method of using the anthropological concepts of the time to produce works of art was quickly questioned and challenged. More and more anthropologists and artists believe that 'beauty' should not only have a single standard based on the concept of racial and cultural equality. However, I believe there is still a lot of room for improvement in overcoming the assumption of a single and arbitrary aesthetic preference, especially in Eastern society. The French sculptor Charles Cordier (1827-1905) is considered to be the first French artist to investigate different cultures through daily interactions with non-Western races (Arabs, Africans, Asians). Through his art, he challenged the prevailing notions of racial superiority and inferiority.

The application of this ethnographic method of direct fieldwork in art has been ever-present in the subsequent history of art, but experienced a shift in direction during the period of post-colonial reflection after World War II. This led to artists to avoid the use of anthropological language in order to overcome colonial thinking, but at the same time they were questioned due to the appropriation of symbols because of the removal of their context. After the 1990s (Schneider and Wright, 2020), anthropology advocated cultural pluralism and intercultural dialogue, and gradually established the uniqueness and value

of its contemporary significance. Under the influence of anthropological traditions and reflective thoughts, contemporary artists use fieldwork methods to collect and process experiential materials through an anthropological perspective that focuses on social and cultural contexts, so as to create works of art or participate in other artistic practices. Today, in the cultural context of deepening globalisation, it has become an important method for artists from different cultural backgrounds around the world to participate together.

In my opinion, contemporary art continues to experience the transformation of time and space, physicality and technology in the context of globalisation. After the pandemic, for example, some art remained virtual in nature, while some art became more focused on actual contact with people in the physical world. In such a process, the intervention of anthropological knowledge is an important impetus in the works of art, which not only enriches the creative resources of the artist, but also changes the way the works of art are produced and the role of the artist. American cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz put forward the premise of changing the way of anthropological interpretation from subjective interpretation to respecting local knowledge. In his article *Art as a Culture System* published in 1976, he reminded researchers and artists that they should conduct ethnographic research and understand the culture rooted in the artwork, and should not be divorced from the environment, context and history of the research subject. In George Marcus's view, to realise this respect for local knowledge, it is necessary to invite cultural practitioners to participate in the production and interpretation process of artistic works. They proposed an artistic cooperation model (Collaboration), through which artists and art participants jointly complete and interpret works through cooperation (Boyer and Marcus, 2020).

This research is based on the results of my field surveys in the UK, using an ethnographic approach to anthropology. The research methods include participatory observation, in-depth interviews and creating works of art. The observation period was 2017 to 2020. During this time, I collected qualitative data through multiple methods. I paid special attention to the allocation of student housing in the UK, the allocation of general family housing in the UK, and the self-image created by research participants on Internet media, as well as influential TV programs (for example, *Love It or List It* and *Grand Designs*) and news reports; in addition, since this research uses residential space to focus on the subjectivity of students studying in the UK, I also collected information from the media sources such as *The Guardian* and the *BBC*, on the process of students' self-image and subjectivisation.

Regarding the role of in-depth interviews, this method can provide researchers with detailed information about personal experiences and feelings, as well as allowing me to fully grasp and observe the opinions of participants, the living environment, values, expressions, body language and dress sense, since this research aims at studying the existential anxiety of British university students through their private space. As already mentioned, this chapter focuses on the subjectivity of these students and the multi-faceted exploration of the subject through the portraits of the participants created on-site, motivating my use of the method of in-depth interviews.

All interviews were concentrated between 2017 and 2020 as, because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, it became impossible to conduct in-person interview after 2020. During this time period, I conducted 55 semi-structured interviews, and to each interview was added about three hours of drawing.



Figure 2.12: Paul Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 1903, graphite & black wash, pen & black ink on wove paper, 29×20.7cm. An autograph manuscript for Gauguin's last literary work, *Avant et après*, made in Atuana, Marquesas.

In visual anthropology, anthropologists mostly use photos or videos as their record materials. Most artists are inspired by these second-hand materials before they create works of art, for example Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). Most works of artistic anthropology consist of academic data compiled by anthropologists through collecting artworks of foreign cultures. Notable examples of artists who have created work by entering the culture of others are Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) [Fig. 2.12] and renowned Taiwanese artist Max Chiwai Liu (1912-2002) [Fig. 2.13]. Liu was an engineer, explorer and artistic anthropologist, known for his expeditions to Africa, Oceania and Borneo and his exploration of primitive art. After a varied career in engineering,



Figure 2.13: Photos of Max Chiwai Liu's expedition from Max Chiwai Liu Online Art Museum, 2022.

writing, publishing and art, he became a professional painter in 1971. He travelled extensively, investigating local art education, ancient painting relics, art, architecture and indigenous cultures. He established the Chinese Art Academy, translated and published many art theory books, and his works have been exhibited in his home country and abroad. As his career progressed, he became more interested in cultural anthropology and ethnography, and is considered an expert in this field (Liu Chiwai Culture and Arts Foundation, 2023). However, there is very little research on the use of painting as an anthropological observation method and phenomenology to explore the relationship between human beings. Most research only focusses on spatial studies in architecture or existential phenomenological studies. The use of art as a research method is not sufficient for such an important and far-reaching topic. It requires deep, diverse and continuous discussion, but few new or different perspectives are being used to investigate this field.

In this art project, my sitters had the power to actively tell their own stories. I

had conversations with them in their private spaces, both verbal and spiritual. I probed deeply into the subject of investigation, learnt to accept different or even mutually exclusive concepts at the same time, and through this continuous exchange of information and culture, emotions were allowed to flow. I tried to present myself as an empty container looking forward to being filled as much as possible. Such works of art are open and resonant. In my portraits, I present the characteristics of the object in a phenomenological sense, without making changes in the ontological sense of the object. I only describe the object with respect to the visual and sensory phenomena of the time and space I was in, and do not use the judgments derived from cognition to evaluate the object.

2.4 Description of research subjects

The interviewees were students studying at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, including undergraduate students, master's students, doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers. They originated from about 20 different countries, including many different races, and they all lived in school dormitories or rented houses near the school. The main sources of interviewees were art students and swing dance club members. If the interviewee was living with their family, their family members also participated in this interview. The interview locations were the interviewees' rooms. The interview target was originally set at 100, but due to the Covid pandemic only 55 were possible, with the remaining interviews cancelled or changed to an online environment. This is considered further in subsequent chapters when discussing

cyberspace. Here I mainly focus on the first 50 face-to-face interviewees.

My reason for using Lancaster students as the research object was that they come from 20 mainstream countries and the majority are 19-39 year-old students who have good family backgrounds, economic advantages and academic qualifications. As a consequence, most of them will have good future work prospects. This group of people will be the most important and largest population in the future society. According to my field data, they are under tremendous social pressure. Even in private spaces, cyberspace has become an integral part of their existence. The second part of this research focuses on the discussion of space issues (private space, cyberspace, painting space). During interviews, in order to know the relationship between the subjectivity and self-construction of the private space for students in rented houses, my question design was from the outside to the inside, and the room decoration and living space reflected their personal life stories. I used the following questionnaire to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants:

1. Could you please tell me your name, nationality, age and major?
2. Can you introduce your family briefly?
3. When you hear the word 'room,' what is its role in your life and what is its meaning to you?
4. When did you first have your own room? Could you tell me the situation?
5. What are the differences between your room and other people's rooms?

6. What are the differences between this room and your room in your family home?
7. What are the most important things in this room?
8. Please tell me your life story. The best way is from when you were born, your childhood, until now. What has happened up until now? You can tell it very slowly. Tell me the detail of the story, because all of the important things for you will be important to me.
9. What is the most important thing that has had an impact on your life?
10. What is the greatest fear in your life?
11. What are your expectations for the future?

All interviews were recorded, following the written and verbal agreement of the participants, and after each interview, I drew a portrait of the interviewee [Fig. 2.14]. Such close interviews are essential to my research, allowing the opportunity to use verbal and non-verbal communication to achieve mutual understanding. Each case was then used to explore the process of contemporary people's anxiety. While such a process is constantly changing, it also sits within a specific context.

While it appeared that, on the surface, I was the listener in these interviews, they were actually dialogues. This research is a way to establish dialogue between different races and cultures. Heidegger distinguishes between 'hearkening' and 'hearing'. When considering our senses, listening is different from hearing. It is a kind of listening to the gatheredness of beings themselves. We are not hearing only what we hear – some



Figure 2.14: Working process.

sounds, or some fragmentary words and meanings; on the contrary, before hearing these sounds, we have already tried to clarify a whole relationship between people and things. We are already in a whole in the context of interconnected environments; Heidegger believes that only in this context can we hear all kinds of people and understand the true meaning of what they want to say: “Those who do not bring together the constant Together are hearers who resemble the deaf.” (Heidegger, 2000, p.137).

In the rental rooms of contemporary young students, inequality, powerlessness, and

conflict increase, instability becomes the norm and the future is lost. This is what I can feel in the room. At the same time, I also try to capture the trajectory of social change and glimpse the future development of society through these young students. Under globalisation, when questioning the dynamic mechanism behind phenomena, images of fluidity and uncertainty, even if they seem disordered, unstable and complex, may be much more important than order, stability and systematicity. The relationship behind fragmented liquidity and uncertainty is not random, meaningless or accidental. So how is it possible to capture, clarify and resolve the relationship between different flows as they aggregate into specific events and social forms? This project attempts to capture this by using artistic ethnography to observe and record the life experiences of contemporary young students.

How should youth be defined? In the past, anthropologists tended to regard youth as a life stage, an age group, or a social organisation. To a certain extent, this made youth as a research object clearly distinguishable, and it was easier for researchers to grasp a universal meaning from a cross-cultural, comparative issue. Compared with this definition, J. Benson Durham strongly emphasises the ‘situatedness’ of the youth category. She proposes a concept of ‘shifter’ to define youth, and believes that most of its meanings come from the actual use, situation and referent of youth, thus its meaning cannot be determined before it is used. Youth, in each social and cultural category, is dynamically generated by mediating through the interactive interface of culture, history, economy and politics (Durham, 2004). Similarly, Michael Cole (2005) claimed that after globalisation, it would be difficult to directly introduce the concepts and achievements of previous anthropological research regarding youth into a new historical stage, and we should face this and reflect on it. Hypotheses that carry developmental

patterns, chronological age stages, transitions of youth to adulthood, etc. in research should be discarded. Cole thus argues that contemporary anthropological research on youth should focus on understanding new people - how new types of youth emerge in new contexts. I use Heidegger's concept of existence to try to analyse how the concept of existence established in the private space of contemporary youth is presented in my artworks, and I try to use the elasticity of abstract concepts in art to interpret these changes and reflect the unsettled nature of the life experiences of young students. In my discussion, I focus specifically on how all students in my pictures are connected with cyberspace, so I discuss how cyberspace affects how students locate themselves within society.

The self-positioning of young people in the world reveals to us new individual and social relationships, and exposes the image of the distribution of social power that is on the verge of crisis. Furthermore, we see new spheres of social power and politics being framed by youth's future decisions (Durham, 2004). As Cole (2005) argues, to understand the current situation of youth, we first need to reconceptualise youth.

In addition, the contemporary spirit requires more flexible, mobile and entrepreneurial individuals, and changes in the political and economic structure will inevitably make the past learning methods, human outlook and definition of success incompatible with the complex situation that most young people are facing. This makes many young people unable to meet the definitions given by these previous contexts in terms of work, stability and income, but at the same time, public opinion tends to ignore these structural factors and generally attribute them to individual failures or generational failures. The retrogression is crowned with the ideas of mental stress, lack of motivation

and lack of action (with designations such as *waste*, *collapse*, and in some cultures *strawberry* – which indicates easily crushed – and *snowflake generation* – the generation of people who became adults in or after the 2010s, viewed as being less resilient and more prone to taking offence than previous generations). My research is about how to make these students visible. When the face-to-face relationship between people has become weaker due to the pandemic, face-to-face dialogue and the environment in which they enter are weaker, and as a result, abstract comments or theoretical models are often very real for young people. At a time when sociology and anthropology exposes the personal experience of changing political and economic structures, the study of art is not just about seeing youth as economic actors or victims of structures, but equally importantly, is about understanding the reality of youth.

The anthropologist's perspective is always keen and sharp: age is not just a biological and psychological phenomenon; society and culture use age to structure social organisation, distribute power, responsibilities and obligations, establish values, and define how individuals face others/society. In addition, anthropologists emphasise that in age politics, there is always room for ambiguity, conflict and contradiction, which allows individuals (often young people) to find gaps within the loosening social structure, renegotiate with power, and breed new possibilities.

The interviews I conducted made me realise that in the Taiwanese education I received before studying a PhD program in the UK, society taught my family members to have connections based on necessity. Such a relationship is an orderly and necessary connection, but does not fully express need and love. Taiwanese don't hug, kiss, or talk of love. A Taiwanese proverb says "The last words add meals, and the next words

remember me”, which basically means I only ask if you are hungry, but I don’t say that I miss you or I love you. When straightforward language is used, there is a possibility of misunderstanding. How can indirect expressions of love and concern achieve the effect of conveying and receiving emotions? This can be seen in the field interviews in the UK; sitters said that love includes physical expressions of affection, but the frankness and closeness between family members is not always present, and in contemporary society we no longer know how to express it. We have become people who can’t adequately express feelings of love or affection. Song Wenli , director of the Institute of Sociology at National Taiwan Tsing Hua University and professor in psychology, (2020) wrote in the preface of *Di, This Abnormal Person*:

Most of the ‘life’ mentioned in the life narrative is about the common growth of family members. In the training of the college, the research of life statement is still in its infancy, Thomas H. Ogden, a famous author of psychoanalysis, in his 2016 article *Language in Psychoanalysis – On Language and Truth in Psychoanalysis* said at the beginning: “The author’s primary focus in this article is the role played by language; how to use language to bring out the truth in life experience in the course of analysis.” This is about the highest ideal of professional training: We don’t deny family affection, but lack the way of expression (Song, 2002).

In my opinion, compared to the Eastern culture of neither saying nor doing, Western culture seems to say too much and tends to appear insincere. The different psychological distances presented by this culture and language are very important in each of my interviews. During the interviews conducted as part of this project, my sitters all told

me their life stories frankly, and many surprised me. After considering the reasons for this, I think I was able to achieve acceptance and respect during the interviews. Another important factor is that I am not the closest person to them. In many cases, people feel that they can't tell the person they are closest to, but often the closest person is also unable listen well. Alienation is sometimes due to closeness. These participants were able to tell me everything, most likely because of the personal distance between us. In addition to distance, I think it is also very important to be honest as a researcher. Carl Rogers (2015) observes, in *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*:

I found that I am a more effective healer when I can hear about myself and be myself very receptively. I feel that over the years, I have learned to listen to myself fully, and as a result I know more fully than before how I really feel at any moment-I can understand that I am really angry or really rejecting someone; or I can feel whether I have enough warmth and love for a person; or whether I am bored or boring about what is happening before me; or whether I am anxious to understand this person, or whether I feel flustered and scared in the relationship with this person. I can hear all kinds of attitudes from myself. I can also say this: I can therefore be more fully able to be myself. I have also become more receptive to what I know as a person who is never perfect, and this person is not always able to operate freely.

In this research project, I am not acting as a healer, but the situation is very similar. I made the participants feel unconditionally accepted, but I didn't accept everything

without emotion. I didn't feel that I was incapable of feeling or concealing my feelings. The unconditional acceptance here occurs since I am willing to look directly at myself and others, the good parts and the bad parts. There is no requirement and no evaluation for acceptance here. This is not a goal that needs to be achieved, but the result of my analysis after conducting more than fifty interviews. The more I am able to reveal the truth inside myself and others, the more I realise that I don't want to rush into the depths of others, but rather just listen. When I try to listen to the experience I am experiencing, or when I can extend the same listening attitude to another person, the more I respect the complex process of life I feel (Rogers, 2015).

The difference between my work and that of Carl Rogers is that I try to adopt a phenomenological perspective. I think that after we expose and look directly at these beings, we can truly see existence, and only after we see the existence, can we understand the source of existential anxiety. During the interviews with these participants, I found that many issues of anxiety appeared in their life stories: for example, they talked about identity and sexual orientation, or the expectations of their family and friends. It was clear that surveillance by friends and family members encouraged participants to invest considerable money and time to maintain or enhance their self-image. This enhanced their value of self-existence and, in turn, brought actual benefits and heightened levels of self-satisfaction. They also mentioned the relationship between the transformation of their private space and their growth and development in life. Therefore, I believe that through the intervention of artworks and recorded interviews, Heidegger's phenomenological theory can allow us to grasp the central dominant principle of contemporary existence behind the words of these participants, and this can be more comprehensively presented through the final oil paintings. In this

research the aim was to get closer to the ‘beings’ we wanted to know. In other words, treating this theory as an ‘ideology’ in our daily life can help us understand how a specific subject achieves understanding of self and the world in which they live, without presupposing that the subject understands or uses various theoretical concepts. This analytical approach allows us to understand the logic or rationality behind the words and actions of the participants.

The data from my interviews show that private space also shapes the individualisation process by which Lancaster students establish themselves as a subject. In other words, owning a private space is not just a place of basic life, but a way of ‘individualising’ people and constructing themselves. In this study, the relationship between such existence and space and time is discussed.

Based on the above, I believe that such a theoretical perspective has the following advantages. First of all, such an interpretive perspective has its relevance in both the British (Western) society in which I now live, and my own native Taiwanese (Eastern) society, despite the geographical and cultural gaps. Confusion and anxiety about existence have been generally formed in contemporary society, due to issues such as ever increasing social pressure and an extremely competitive job market. Understanding why and how such confusion and anxiety exist, are key elements required to eliminate existential anxiety. Secondly, and more importantly, in the process of individualisation, we show through artworks that the logic behind the individual’s existence may be a victim of blind obedience under structural oppression, but it may also be a manifestation of the subject’s initiative, and the perspective of interpretation opens up the same understanding of existence in Britain and Taiwan.

Phenomenology points out that in the individualisation process of contemporary college students, there may be blind followers of social structure and culture, but there may also be dynamic creators who actively use this unequal relationship to open up their lives, as well as a whole range of combinations of these two possibilities. More detailed and unique individual descriptions and judgments needed to be supplemented by field data, qualitative interviews, case context, artistic works, and various detailed ethnographic features. Therefore, this theoretical framework and the research method adopted for this project are complementary and indispensable.

2.5 Theoretical framework

In 1955, Heidegger developed the topology of existential truth in *On the Question of Being*. From this work, I use his fourfold theory to explore how the interconnectedness of things can reveal the truth. This concept coincides with that found in Eastern Taoism. When I try to tease out this truth, it goes beyond simply understanding the artwork, my sitters, and myself as an artist. It's about trying to understand who we are and where we are. Within the context of this discourse, we do not exist in this world by ourselves, we are interwoven fields. Both technology and art are fields of creation, but they also have a kind of 'knowing' (wisdom) in them. This concept is echoed by the broader concept of technology and art explored by Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935). Heidegger and Taoism also discuss a method of perception. This way of perceiving the world, of 'seeing' and 'knowing', is also the way I create oil paintings. It is not just a theoretical visualisation, but how we see others and ourselves, as well

as the cultural driving forces and principles hidden behind people's lives. These are intertwined in our daily life. My series of works provide a shock to make us consciously aware of this world of everyday life. I try to describe the existence of Dasein in this inseparable relationship between philosophical consciousness and the reality of daily life between the brush strokes I leave in each private room. Dasein is the German word for 'existence'. It is a fundamental concept in the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger uses the expression Dasein to refer to the experience of being that is particular to human beings. This is different from the traditional Metaphysics, which pursues the knowledge of absolute truth while ignoring the limited vision of its own truth system. This method of revealing the truth through art, simultaneously results in the veiling and unveiling of what lies beneath the surface. The reality of art exists in the world, on the earth, between Dasein and existence.

2.6 Relationship between the research method and project objectives

When I consider in my dissertation how body, space and time are involved in the process of making my art, I am asking how contemporary art and philosophy underpin the existence of contemporary people. I try to discern the cornerstones of experience in which contemporary society differs from the pre-modern world.

During the course of this study, the anxiety of sitters was observed. The event of 'seeing' is concretely witnessed through the artistic process and works of art. I have

observed that most contemporary people are very anxious about the matter of 'being seen and not being seen'. This existential anxiety is reinforced by social media. My sitters were all young people with high economic and cultural capital and, as such, they are not burdened with worries about the economy and enjoy a high degree of freedom. I have observed that their survival anxiety comes from this freedom. These young people are no longer constrained by the sexual anxiety of fear of the father in Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex, but are at a loss because of the unlimited choices they are faced with. This method of establishing one's own existence exhibits two extremes. One is not to post any information on social media, but to hide it, watch a lot of other people's lives and make evaluations on your own life based on this. I want to be seen, but I am afraid of being seen; the other extreme is posting on social media all the time, afraid that others will not pay attention. The rebellion of people in this generation is no longer that I want to be myself, because I already have the freedom to do whatever I want. So people's collective anxiety becomes 'I have done so much, please look at me'. People are afraid of not being noticed by other people.

I pay attention to the real relationship between the body and art, the positioning of space for Dasein, and the release of time in art and cyberspace. These are issues related to the survival of contemporary youth and concern the discussion of the truth. I use artwork to expand these hidden truths. My whole process of artistic action provides a kind of middle ground within the subtle and struggling human nature under the interference of readily available information from Internet. In this small piece of wasteland, constructed by artistic techniques and artistic language, I try to uncover a truth that is both concealed and revealed. I explicitly allow the sitters be seen through real interactions. Although the anxiety of this era still exists, I try to use this method

to allow everyone to truly see themselves.

Despite the many advantages of my research approach, it is important to note some key limitations of my chosen methodology. Firstly, the 55 subjects who took part in the study were all studying at Lancaster University at the time of interview and so, despite their various cultural backgrounds, they all shared fairly similar current experiences and living situations. This study also lacks specific records of quantitative data due to the use of free-flowing in-depth interviews. Additionally, the many variables associated with each interview process and completed portrait are specific to that situation and moment in time, and hence irreproducible. An further research obstacle arose due to the fact that the study participants spoke a wide variety of first languages, but all interviews were conducted in English. Therefore myself and the subjects may not have been able to communicate with each other in their native language. This may have caused some interference to the research, but it also added value to this study because of the complex ethnic and cultural factors under analysis.

One source limitation regarding the choice of theoretical framework for the research, is that much of the use of space theory is restricted to theories from Heidegger and Taoism. These viewpoints were selected because I felt the strange similarities between these Eastern and Western thoughts, helped to capture the observed similarities between different cultures and races. In the discussion about time and the modern Internet, I added the viewpoints of Bernard Stiegler and Yuk Hui to make up for the obvious deficiencies of earlier theories. Since these theories evolved from the thinking of Heidegger, they seemed like the natural choice to extend his thinking to the present age. I think it is dangerous, perhaps even contradictory, to use a single, final definition

of Phenomenology from one theory. In fact, Phenomenology is neither a doctrine nor a school of philosophy, but a style of thought and a method of thinking. Therefore, the exposition of this research can be said to be just an explanation observed from my point of view. The phenomena observed could lead to countless conclusions.

I think the method of painting maintains its simplicity. Art has multiple faces today, and there are layers of veils that are difficult to understand in many studies. I think some things are still hidden under the surface, and painting retains a lot of emotion that can only be created by people face-to-face. Painting may carry a narrative, but it is full of indescribable language, not illustration. As an ancient and primitive creative language, painting retains a sense of originality, which is not a defect, but a kind of original motherhood. Everyone likes to draw when they are young. As an artist, when you draw, you remain aware of this purity of drawing. It is a creative activity that everyone has been interested in since time immemorial and this interest has not declined. The value of drawing lies in showing who we are when we put pen to paper in two dimensions. The moment when we can maintain the original simplicity in the painting, or change the shape and colour arbitrarily, is precious. Through this kind of painting action, sitters are seen, and at the same time, I elicit some of their memories and a primitive aspect of their own life. How this change of mood and emotion affects others in the work and how others are affected by the work cannot be assumed a priori, but are constructed through the artistic process. As John Berger said in *Ways of Seeing* (Berger, 2008): “We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.”

Part 1

Body

Chapter 3

Body consciousness at the moment of artistic composition

In this chapter I will analyse the importance of the moment of artistic composition in my process, and its relationship to body awareness. This moment encompasses how we orient our human (body) existence. What is the place of this person (body) in the work of art? I will use what Edmund Husserl's phenomenological theory calls 'consciousness' to explain what happens to artists and sitters at this moment of artistic composition. This connection between the art-making process and body consciousness is closely related to the act of revealing the essence of existence and the true meaning of the artwork. In *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (Husserl, 2014), Husserl began to emphasise that in the experience phenomenon of our turbulent stream of consciousness, there is another layer of 'Pure Ego' integrated nature, which can take the initiative to change the constant flow. Each moment of consciousness is unified

into one consciousness. According to Husserl (2008), one of the mysteries in life is that consciousness comes from nowhere. Consciousness is no longer subjective – it transcends subjectivity and objectivity. When consciousness is opened, there is a conscious world, and a ‘me’ who can be conscious. The West asks how the world can be understood by a subjective self on an objective basis.

Husserl (2008) said: “It is not that I have consciousness, but consciousness has me”. Applying this to my artistic practice, I feel that: I didn’t do this art act, it was rather this art act that owned me. Because of consciousness, I have the world in front of me. Consciousness opens up the recognised object, the nature of which we can leave aside. This is called Phenomenological Epoché, taken from the Greek word *ἐποχή* for ‘suspension of judgement’, which means to put aside all things that one has doubts about, without discussion, and make no judgments about those things. Husserl believed that natural science and cultural science, which set the world as a fact, confine human cognition to the real and concrete things that sensory perception can immediately and directly perceive. We don’t think about why we know it or whether what we know is true or not. Phenomenological Epoché behaviour like this removes any preconceptions. Without such preconceptions, we can get to know someone from scratch.

In the process of creating my art, I try to get to know my sitter from scratch, without prejudice or preconceptions. I use interviews to slowly establish who this person is, then I build the image of this person from scratch on the canvas: first destroying, and then building; and at the same time, consciousness is created in the process of painting. Like love: the feeling of love happens, the object of your love appears, and you become the person who loves. In the process of creating a work of art, the object

being depicted appears, and the artist becomes a creator of the object. Such a process is based on Husserl's point of view. He believes that when we accept an event, the Phenomenological Epoché is first subjected to Phenomenological Reduction. What's left when we bracket everything that has a tinge of doubt is 'phenomenological residue'. If we remove all uncertainty in this way, what remains at the bottom of our consciousness is called 'phenomenological description' (Husserl, 2005). Such a phenomenological description is very difficult because there is nothing to say. From here, things are built up bit by bit. So during my painting process, there is no conversation; I use only my paints and canvas for phenomenological description. Here, I try to be objective, but no method is entirely objective.

The phenomenological approach makes us ask again, why is this question important? Because such questioning is aimless, just like my artwork is aimless. The question of phenomenology is to really want to understand the essence of a thing, and through my work, I really want to understand a person. When we want to truly get to know someone, stereotypes and racism naturally disappear and there is the added value of sincerely knowing another human being. I will discuss this topic in more detail in the next chapter. In this context, the way of asking questions becomes very important. Art is how I ask questions, so the way I create a work of art, and the time and space in which it is created, becomes very important. I need to find the phenomenological residue. I need to see my sitters face to face. I need to hear and record their stories. I need to respond to their stories. I need to actually smell and hug them. I need to open up all my senses to create my work while they move. In this process, no moment is the same as another, so is my sitter still the same sitter? Where is the identity?

Time passes in each change. Each change is not summed up by experience, but the unity of the world is given along with each moment of consciousness. I know that I am changing every moment, and in the midst of change I know that I am going through this change. Husserl described this process as ‘transcendental’. In the affirmation of the conscious subject, there is an important breakthrough: the admission that there is an essential being that does not change with time in the constantly changing consciousness; and it is worth noting that to Husserl (2006), this essential being is a kind of subjective existence. Husserl found that on the edge of the conscious object, there is still a layer of obscurity that is undeniable. For example, in the spatial orientation, our consciousness is focused on the table in front of us. But at the fringes of my consciousness, I still know that this table is in my house, and my house is in Taipei. In terms of time, although our consciousness is focused on the present moment, this moment is still a continuous point in the stream of time consciousness from the past to the present. Seeing, and projecting a kind of anticipation of things in advance, in the future that will not come, is also the horizon of meaning, and this concept of horizon is important in the process of creating a work of art.

Heidegger’s concept of space can be said to be a concept of ‘boundary’ (Chi, 2018). In this hypothesis, the boundary travels through a space intertwined by ‘locale’, and ‘locale’ guides all ‘gethers’, making things the noumenon of things, and ‘shelters’ the essence of things (Heidegger, 1998, p.292). Through this analysis, he obtained the meaning of the ‘thing’ in a space interwoven from four places. This is the ‘Fourfold’ (*Geviert*), which presents the ‘gethers’ of ‘sky’, ‘earth’, ‘mortals’, and ‘divinities’. In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger tries to define the difference between ‘place’ and ‘space’ (Heidegger, 2019). The ‘place’ is not a space under the definition of geometry.

It's in a sense of the world, of people having a tacit understanding of the circumspection of daily life. This 'tacit understanding' does not appear 'present-at-hand'. Heidegger believed that in the 'circumspection' we see the significance of 'ready-to-hand' in totality of involvement. People understand themselves 'where-in' by being in that certain place. People and things, people and the environment, together show their own characteristics and essence in this place; that is, people as 'Dasein', or 'being-in', leading to 'directionality' and 'de-severance'. Heidegger declared in *Being and Time* the 'first law of phenomenology' – the 'law of proximity' or 'the distance of the near' – which states that what is closest to us in our everyday worldly environment is, like the prescription on the glasses through which we see, furthest from us in terms of our ability to attend to and comprehend it explicitly. This is seen as 'placeless'. When we have less and less awareness of the objects at hand, the objects at hand are more real. Glasses and shoes are examples. Only when glasses and shoes break, do we realise they exist. We don't realise we're wearing shoes when we walk, and that's how shoes exist at their best. We only feel the presence of shoes when we feel they are hurting our feet. In *The Thing* (1950), Heidegger writes that "Men alone, as mortals, by dwelling attain to the world as world. Only what conjoins itself out of world becomes a thing" (Heidegger, 1971, p.180). Heidegger hopes to explain the 'thing' through the fourfold (*Geviert*). The fourfold is a gathering of Earth, sky, divinities and mortals (heaven, earth, gods and people), it makes the world global and things can be the key to meaning. Heidegger described the 'fourfold' like this:

Earth and sky, divinities and mortals – being at one with one another of their own accord – belong together by way of simpleness of the united fourfold. Each of the four mirrors in its own way the presence of the others. Each

therewith reflects itself in its own way into its own, within the simpleness of the four. This mirroring does not portray a likeness. The mirroring, lightening each of the four, appropriates their own presencing into simple belonging to one another. Mirroring in this appropriating – lightening way, each of the four plays to each of the others. The appropriative mirroring sets each of the four free into its own, but it binds these free ones into the simplicity of their essential being toward one another. (Heidegger, 1971, p. 177)

In here, we can see that in the fourfold, Earth, sky, divinities and mortals each map their own ‘Dasein’ in their own way, and at the same time map the presence of the other three parties in their own way. This mapping is not a ‘reproduction’ in the sense of representation; at the same time Earth, sky, divinities and mortals are independent but belong to one. This reminds me of the Taoist concept of space and person, which I will analyse in the next section. In *Tao Te Ching* (570 BC), the five dimensions of ‘human, earth, heaven, Tao, and nature’ in a sense constitute a world. Compared with Heidegger’s ‘Fourfold’, the Taoist concept considers different characteristics and ways of thinking.

In the *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1936) essay, Heidegger gives us an image of the ‘*lichtung*’, the clearing in the woods, in which being comes into view. In the midst of beings as a whole an open place comes to presence: there is a clearing. Thought of by beings, it is more being than the beings. This open centre is, therefore, not surrounded by beings. Rather, this illuminating centre itself encircles all beings – like the nothing that we scarcely know (Heidegger, 2002, p.30). This constructs a point of being where

everything around is connected.

My work captures something real because I use this method. I think this kind of disclosure of truth is purposeless, inadvertent, incidental, but probably the most important meaning and value of a work of art. This kind of artistic behaviour includes me and my sitters, and both our bodies, perceptions, and fields. This is the same as photography, but different from those painters who simply copy a photograph. Such an artistic act is similar to Henri Cartier-Bresson's (1996) 'the decisive moment,' but I put more emphasis on the process of body consciousness behind this moment. This process is transcendental and is also the non-stop output of my conscious subject.

Thinking from Husserl's point of view, it is necessary to insist on the standpoint of subjectivity, because insisting on subjectivity also means using our initiative relative to the immediate world, taking a decisive position and, with this, having the ability to actively construct the world. Artists are called artists because they have this ability to actively construct the world. From the perspective of Husserl's later phenomenology, what he advocates is that we are not only the carrier of passive experience in the external world, but also the subject who actively constructs and gives meaning to the world at the same time.

Any phenomenon that is presented to me is already a certain empirical phenomenon that has been tainted by our consciousness, and the so-called objectivity is also an inevitable phenomenon of the active structure of this subject. So, in my artistic act, I don't just look, I look into the depths of the sitters' bodies. This refers to the abstract, but also to the depths of physicality. In addition to the knowledge of the sitter's life story, their physical habits influence the placement of the bones and muscles.

Their thinking influences how facial expressions are presented. These external physical characteristics in turn affect the way the world treats them. This creates a cycle in their lives. If I can't use the concept of anatomy to look into their bodies, I can't see the logic of how these bodies relate to the world and I can't achieve the purpose of my artwork, which is to reveal the real existence. When I see a figure that has no anatomical concept, it feels like the flesh and bones are not congruent.

Husserl's phenomenology is the first philosophical system to successfully convince people that the world we live in is not a subjective mind thinking about meaning at one end, and an objective universe operating by mechanical laws at the other end. It was Husserl who succeeded in persuading us of the fact that the diametrically opposed relationship between sentient beings and the inexorable world is not a reasonable starting point for thinking. This oppositional setting is not so much a mature view after rational reflection, but rather that we have the most deeply rooted ideology of modern people. Martin Heidegger used Husserl's phenomenological concept to develop his own theory, moving away from Husserl's subjectivism. Contrary to Husserl's view of man as composed of various states of consciousness, Heidegger believes that consciousness is secondary to the primacy of one's being (i.e. 'Dasein', way of being). Dasein cannot be reduced to one's awareness of its existence. I think that although the two have different directions, they both focus on exploring the essence of human existence. I borrow Husserl's concept of consciousness to explain the importance of the momentary method of the artistic process, and use Heidegger's Dasein in the following chapters to explain the existence of human beings, their positioning in space and time, and the relationship of such existence to the work of art. What I want to describe here is that the process and method of making a work of art determines whether the work of art

can reveal the real existence.

Chapter 4

Culture studies through practice – oil painting, colour and race

In my artistic research, I hope to be able to get to know someone from scratch through the method of phenomenology. Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, thought that the scientific foundation of the West was mathematics, but what is the basis of the logic of mathematics and the objectivity of numbers themselves? For us ordinary people, logic is logic, numbers are numbers, and as long as we can calculate in our daily life, it is enough. Why would we ask questions about the objective basis of a number?

In this chapter, I try to use Husserl's way of thinking to analyse the relationship between skin colour and race in my work. Colour can be a colour, as well as an ethnicity. I also make use of Edward Said's thoughts on *Orientalism* (1978), criticising the Western romantic attitude towards the Eastern world, but applied to my interviews

and observations in this study, as opposed to the Arab World. Furthermore, the history of the use of skin colour is reviewed to highlight how the historical assumptions about specific traits influenced subsequent thinking about human diversity. I also explore the hidden phenomenon of cultural power from the perspective of an artist viewing colour.

However, this chapter does not include my own experience of implicit discrimination and that of many of the students interviewed. The majority of highly educated people generally understand what politically correct language is. Everyone has been taught that racist language is unacceptable. But behaviours such as unconsciously viewing Asians as younger and more vulnerable, seeing other ethnicities as less professionally competent because of language barriers, and the unconscious dismissal of international students are all too common at universities. These things are still part of the daily life of international students currently studying at Lancaster University. However, since these phenomena are less likely to be shown in my research and works, they are beyond the scope of this chapter. If you are interested in this topic, I recommend the book *The End of Bias: A Beginning: The Science and Practice of Overcoming Unconscious Bias*, by Jessica Nordell (2021).

Taking the objective basis of numbers as an example, Husserl's (Tsai, 1990) thinking is also very interesting. For example, imagine that five people are approaching right now. We say the number 'five', but 'five people' may include white people or black people, men, women, and children. They may be tall, short, fat, or thin. What do we mean when we say 'five'? A number? Five people, completely different people? Husserl thinks that 'five' is not a rule that our mind abstracts from many differences. So, is there a gap to be explained between the number that is abstracted and the reality of



Figure 4.1: Titanium White, Emerald Green, Sienna, Raw Sienna and Lamp Black.

concrete life itself? So, is ‘five’, the number, the subjective construction of the human mind? Or should we move the objectivity of numbers to another base? Assuming that this objective basis exists, what would this objective basis be? And where?

The word ‘colour’ can refer to a colour or to a race.

In my research, I have included students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The colours I use to paint skin are: Titanium White, Emerald Green, Sienna, Raw Sienna and Lamp Black. I use only these colours when painting any person, no matter what their skin colour [Fig. 4.1]. This is demonstrated by the skin colour in the paintings. Race is not based on prudent empirical reasoning. On the contrary, it is an arbitrary artificial creation and a social construction.

We may be accustomed to calling the people of the European continent ‘white’, the people of the African continent ‘black’, and the people of the Asian continent, ‘yellow’. When I was painting the so-called ‘white’ subjects, I used more Titanium White, Emerald Green and Lamp Black; when I was painting the so-called ‘black’



Figure 4.2: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Christos Apostolides* (Cypriot, detail), 2019, oil on canvas.



Figure 4.3: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Tsveta Hristova* (Bulgarian, detail), 2018, oil on canvas.

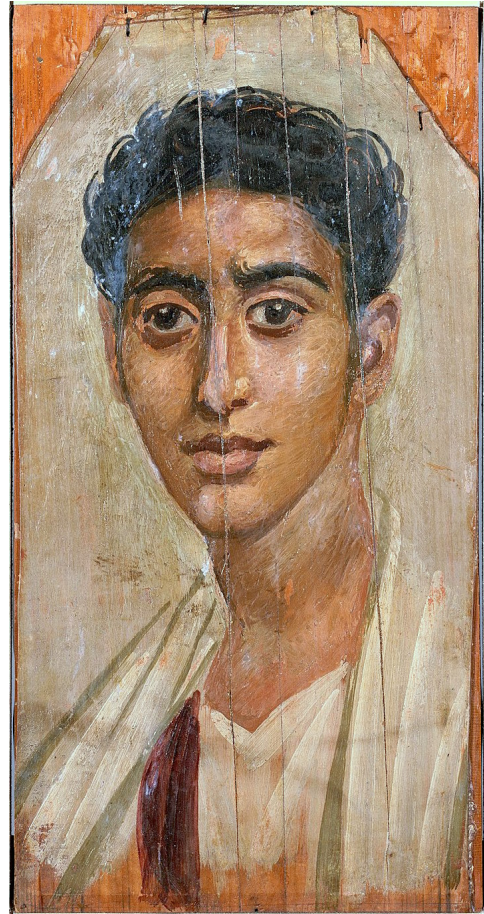


Figure 4.4: *Mummy Portrait of a Man.*

subjects I used more Sienna, and Raw Sienna; when I was painting the so-called ‘yellow’ subjects I used Titanium White and Sienna. This is a very interesting phenomenon. I used black when painting ‘white’ people because the skin tones of white people are colder and need some white and black to help with such cool tones; I often used red to paint ‘black’ people, because their skin colour is warmer; I used a lot of white to paint ‘yellow’ people, because the yellow skin colour is almost hidden under the skin, so I will put a little Emerald Green and Raw Sienna on the canvas first, and then use a lot Titanium White plus a little Sienna. So ‘white’ people are actually grey, ‘black’ people are actually red, and the ‘yellow’ people are actually white.

This is just a shallow discussion of people on three continents. It is much more complicated in the Mediterranean region. In the so-called ‘white’ people in the Mediterranean and the so-called ‘black’ people in North Africa, the skin colour shows a significant similarity. This can be seen from my works *Christos Apostolides* [Fig. 4.2] and *Tsveta Hristova* [Fig. 4.3], featuring Cypriot and Bulgarian subjects respectively, and the depiction of an Egyptian in *Mummy Portrait of a Man* [Fig. 4.4], and *Moroccan* by Zinaida Serebriakova [Fig. 4.5].

These four people who seem to be similar in colour are divided into white and black because of their geographical location. Conversely, white people in the Mediterranean region and white people in the Nordic countries might have significant differences in their skin colour. This can be seen clearly from my works *Chryso Sorokkon* (Cypriot) [Fig. 4.6] and *Kasia Tatys* (Polish) [Fig. 4.7]. But what’s more interesting is that from my works *Tsveta Hristova* (Bulgarian) [Fig. 4.8] and *Pernille Jorgensen* (Norwegian) [Fig. 4.9], we see that their skin colour is similar. *Georgia Efstathiou* (Cypriot) [Fig.



Figure 4.5: Zinaida Serebriakova, *Moroccans*, 1928, pastel on paper.



Figure 4.6: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Chryso Sorokkon* (Cypriot, detail), 2019, oil on canvas.



Figure 4.7: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Kasia Tatys* (Polish, detail), 2019, oil on canvas.

4.10] is whiter than them, however. In short, if we divide the human skin colour based only on the depth of the skin, this is completely arbitrary. Franz Boas (Lassiter, 2009, p.29) believes that race is not based on prudent and intensive evidence. It is an arbitrary artificial creation and a social construction. He also pointed out that human beings as a whole have more similarities than dissimilarities, because since the emergence of Homo sapiens, we have been multiplying and merging. This is especially true in this century. The convenience of transportation and the development of the Internet have accelerated the speed of integration of different races.

In 1753 the Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus defined four races and their characteristics in *System of Nature*. He gave the human species its formal name, Homo sapiens. He also divided the species into subcategories: red Americans, yellow Asians, black Africans, and white Europeans. He described Homo sapiens americanus as “ill-



Figure 4.8: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Tsveta Hristova* (Bulgarian, detail), 2019, oil on canvas.



Figure 4.9: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Pernille Jorgensen* (Norwegian, detail), 2018, oil on canvas.

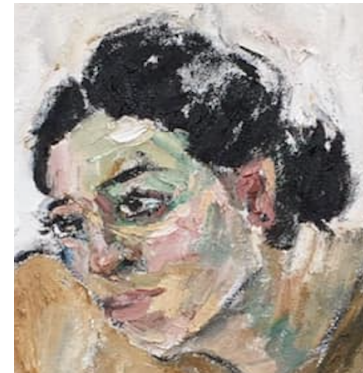


Figure 4.10: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Georgia Efstathiou* (Cypriot, detail), 2020, oil on canvas.

tempered, ...obstinate, contented, free.” Homo sapiens asiaticus was “severe, haughty, desirous.” Homo sapiens afer was “crafty, slow, foolish.” And Homo sapiens europaeus was “active, very smart, inventive” (Olson, 2001). This idea has deep roots. The role of words in truth cannot be ignored, because both our thinking and existence have to work through words. These constructs are not equivalent or average, they all have different materiality and descriptiveness. Unfortunately, the racial discrimination constructed by these ancient texts still affects our lives to this day. Since skin colour is a visible physical feature, it remains one of the chief traits used to categorise people. Colour itself is neutral, but it derives meaning from our experience of it and the value we assign to it. As Bastide memorably put it, “Colours are not important in themselves... , but as bearers of a message” (Bastide, 1968, p.34, cited in Jablonski, 2021). The historical use of skin colour as a means of classification shifted away from being purely geographical and environmental to a means of evaluating the culture and behaviour of others (Dikotter, 1992, cited in Jablonski, 2021). Through historical and cultural evolution, skin colour has become a cultural and genetic marker in real societies, with

a stereotyped cognitive association. Such associations can have multiple effects on an individual's expected behaviour and responses (Eberhardt, 2005; Eberhardt et al., 2004; Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998; Guterl, 2001, cited in Jablonski, 2021). This fact affects both objective assessment and subjective judgment, reinforced by experience (Bourdieu, 2000, cited in Jablonski, 2021).

In all aspects of life, “the world is translated into a coding problem” (Haraway, 1991), and this translation process is not innocent or value neutral. These prejudices in the language of colour significantly influence scientific and medical judgment to this day. According to Chaplin and Jablonski (2020, cited in Jablonski, 2021), terms of race evoke pejorative and negative associations, and these effects are unconscious. These unconscious influences can prevent scientists or doctors from neutrally interpreting scientific data or experimental results. At the same time, these names and categories can also awaken or repeat stereotypes at a superficial level and affect how scientists view each other's research results. This warrants attention and revisiting as a problem, not just as an intellectual phenomenon.

For those who think that race-thinking is not pervasive in modern science or that race labels have fallen into disuse, consider the fact that a PubMed search run in October 2020 yielded over 114,252 occurrences of “Caucasian” from 1971 to 2020, with the years of peak occurrences (over 6000 per year) falling between 2011 and 2017. Many fields of biomedical research and of clinical medicine are the last redoubts of institutional use of “Caucasian,” along with “Caucasoid” (66, 778 occurrences since 1971), “Negroid” (81, 399 occurrences since 1971) and “Mongoloid” (72, 542 occurrences since 1971).

“Caucasian” is the most widely used common name for a color-based race and probably has been more widely retained in common parlance because labels affixed to the dominant group in society are considered normal, standard, and not disparaging. (Jablonski, 2021)

Coding is a process of fragmentation and recombination, fragmentation of organisms and reorganisation of heterogeneous fragments (Haraway, 1991). My research is action, the relationship between language and body. Haraway emphasised that the world is written. I use the paintings as a tool to record the world and tell a story. I think it is not impossible to use paintings to make a reasonable explanation of the world. My description of the world presented in my paintings is not just a series of portraits, but a representation of the struggle for the survival of human life. Although pointing out these injustices cannot alleviate the pain of the discriminated against, it can make this pain recognised and offer victims support.

As what Linnaeus might have described as a yellow person, I was surprised to be called yellow by a black man in the UK for the first time. I started thinking, am I really yellow? In the eyes of others, do I look like the Simpsons? Or a yellow peril? Yellow, like most colours, may have both positive and negative meanings, depending on the language and context of use. The good yellow is reminiscent of sunlight, the sun, and gold; the bad yellow has betrayal, jealousy, cowardice, and hypocrisy. In medieval Christian art, yellow is the colour of Judas and Jews; in modern times ‘yellow’ is used for warning signs, such as traffic signs or school buses (Keevak, 2015). J.W Goethe (1840) (Goethe, 1970), in his work *Theory of colour (Zur Farbenlehre)*, wrote that ‘yellow’ is the colour closest to light, presenting a characteristic of serene happiness

and soft stimulation. But when yellow appears on the ‘dirty and rough’ surface, the beautiful impression of “fire and gold becomes dirty; the colours of glory and joy turn into restlessness and aversion.” Yellow becomes the image of bankruptcy, a Jew, and a man betrayed by his wife. Yellow Peril, a term that appeared in 1895, is generally considered to have been created by Kaiser Wilhelm II during the Sino-Japanese war, the response from many countries neighbouring China was to call this war the ‘yellow war’. Yellow peril is an erratic concept that may refer to China, Japan, or any other ‘yellow’ country. It may also refer to many kinds of scourges, such as overpopulation, paganism, economic competition, and social or political decline. However, we will also see that the West has begun to import its so-called self-evident concepts of ‘yellow race’ and ‘Mongolian race’ into the context of East Asia, and this dissemination process is almost never simple and straightforward.

In Michael Keevak’s article *Becoming yellow: a short history of racial thinking* (2015), the earliest mention of East Asia is from Marco Polo. The descriptions of Marco Polo and 13th-century missionaries began, and if they mentioned the skin colour of the residents, they were almost all clearly pointed out as ‘white’. The concept of ‘yellow skin’ for East Asians could not be found before the nineteenth century, and this concept did not come from any witness descriptions or Western interpretations of East Asian cultural symbols. The concept of the yellow race is not derived from travelling or missionary literature, but from scientific discourse. In the nineteenth century, ‘yellow’ had become a title referring to race. In other words, East Asians did not become ‘yellow’ until they were classified as a ‘yellow’ race; they were originally called Mongolian at the end of the eighteenth century. In 1864, French doctor and traveler François Bernier published a short article in which he “proposed a new distinction based on the different

human races that live on Earth” (Keevak, 2015, p58). He pioneered that ‘yellow races’ are one of these races. He did not say that East Asians were ‘yellow’, he called them ‘véritablement blanc’. The only thing he described as ‘yellow’ was not at all related to an entire geographic group, but to certain people from India, especially women. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant is considered the source of this view, and he agreed that the Indians are ‘true yellow’. These early descriptions of skin colour were very simplified, and the so-called white was not used to refer to race or even skin colour. If the Chinese or Japanese are described as ‘white’, this is because of wealth and sophisticated culture. ‘White’ here is just an evaluation, not a narrative. This ‘white’ evaluation is only because Europeans considered that these East Asians had the opportunity to become ‘civilised’ (converted to Christianity). For this reason, the Japanese were ‘whiter’ than the Chinese for a time because hundreds of thousands of people had changed their religious beliefs at the end of the sixteenth century (Keevak, 2015). Matteo Ricci complained in 1569 that in Guangdong, China, unlike Japan, only a hundred people had converted to Christianity in fifteen years. Michael Keevak (2015) believes that some opinions that insist Chinese people have dark skin are related to their unwillingness to change their religion. I was very surprised when I first heard the British classify both Indians and myself (Taiwanese) as Asians in Britain. In my opinion, Indians have deeper outlines and darker skin tones. In my work *Priyanka Mistry* (Indian British) [Fig. 4.11] I used a lot of Sienna to achieve her skin tone accurately. My works *Priyanka Mistry* and *Yanyun Huang* (Taiwanese) [Fig. 4.12] also show the different skin tone between these two nationalities. East Asia and South Asia also have very different religions, lifestyles, and eating habits. This geographical division of race is controversial. What exactly is ‘Oriental’? The definition in the



Figure 4.11: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms* - Priyanka Mistry, 2020, oil on canvas.



Figure 4.12: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Yanyun Huang*, 2018, oil on canvas.

Western world is a mess, confusing geographic definitions, as well as the uncertainty about the abstract concept of colour. These have shaped the stereotypical image of the Western world in the East. In 1600, the Western description of the skin colour of Chinese people¹ was ‘brown’, ‘red’, ‘tan’, ‘black’ and ‘dark black’, and it was also described as ‘dark brown’, ‘sepia’, ‘grey’, ‘ruddy’, ‘olive’, ‘hazel’, ‘light black’, ‘reddish’ and ‘light red’ [Fig. 4.13].

Eighteenth-century philosophers understood that ‘east’ refers to Lebanon and Jordan, not China and India (Frayling, 2014). In 1821, Thomas de Quincey’s work *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* was published. The East described in the book mixes China, India, the Near East and North Africa, and even covers Eastern Europe, and in his description, he seems to mix all of them. In 1987, Edward Said’s ‘Orientalism’ did not include China, but was dominated by Islamic civilisation. Geography was limited to the Middle East and North Africa. The book describes how, although he was enlightened by Western academic thoughts, he suffered unequal treatment because he was from an ‘Oriental’ background. In such an unknown chaos between the East and the West, I think lack of knowledge brings fear of each other. Therefore, there is such a term as ‘yellow peril’ to degrade the East and interpret the understanding and stereotype of the East. These stereotypes of the East always describe the Orientals as “cold-blooded, cunning, revengeful, and inscrutable”, exemplified by classic characters such

¹Brown and dark black: Mondoza, *The historie of the great and mightie kingdom of China*, 4,19; dark black: Heylyn, *Cosmographie*, 865; red and tan: Escalante, *Discourse of the Navigation*, sig, 21; brown and black : Linschoten, *Discourse of Voyages into ye Easte & West Indies*, 1:40; Tan and Dark Brown: Le Comte, *Meemoirs and observations*, 127; Black and Tan: Palafox y Mendoza, *The History of the Conquest of china by the Tartars*, 547; Grey: Dampiar, *A new Voyaga Round the World*, 1: 407; Black and Red: d’Avlty, *The Estates, Empires & Principallities of the World*, 719; Olive, Maroon and Reddish: Du Halde , *A Description of the Empire of China*, 1: 281; Bright red: Du Halde, *The General History of China*, 2: 138; Dark brown and light black: Barrow, *Travels in China*, 184.



Figure 4.13: Some colours I found in Pantone.

as Fu Manchu. Such ideas are deeply valued in Western thought, and spread through drama, novels and television. When the British historian Victor Kiernan (1932, cited in Keevak, 2015) analysed the concept of the ‘yellow peril’, he considered this a useful concept to remind humans of the scourge of overpopulation in China and Britain.

The concept of ‘yellow peril’ is a certain starting point for human civilisation’s retreat when faced with the nightmare of human overproduction. Human profligacy has become the greatest scourge of civilisation, not only economically, but also psychologically. Compared with the derogatory Western term ‘yellow peril’ used since the Opium War (1840), in the late Qing Dynasty, the Chinese regarded ‘yellow’ as the self-identification of the concept of the common ancestor of the emperor, as in traditional Chinese culture, yellow is the colour of emperors [Fig. 4.14], and as such, was a positive term (Frayling, 2014).

Chinese politician Liang Qichao used the ‘yellow peril’ to emphasise that ‘our tribe’ has a formidable power to inspire people. “黑鬼紅番遭白墮，白也憂黃禍，黃禍者誰亞洲，我我我！” (translated as “The black people and the red Indians have fallen into white, and white is also worried about the yellow peril.”) (Liang, 1957, cited in Keevak, 2015, p.36). Such pride in ‘yellow’, however, has not been maintained for a long time. After the Eight-Nation Alliance² Forces were formed in 1900, the term ‘yellow peril’ became a kind of denigration of China. Such a ‘yellow peril’ became a threat to white people’s authentication, and at the same time oriental people were afraid of the power

²It refers to the eight-nation joint army of Russia, Britain, the United States, France, Germany, Japan, Austria-Hungary, and Italy that invaded the Qing Dynasty in military operations to suppress the Boxer Movement and rescue foreign embassies in 1900. After this war, the Qing Dynasty paid large sums of compensation to various countries and allowed them to divide Beijing into different regions to occupy. This war hastened the demise of the Qing Dynasty.



Figure 4.14: Yellow is the colour of emperors (光緒帝).



Figure 4.15: Kenyan artist Michael Soi, *China loves Africa*, 2020.

of white people, fearing extinction at the hands of another nation. This mentality continued to have a profound impact until the advent of contemporary China. In the work of Kenyan artist Michael Soi, *China loves Africa* [Fig. 4.15], China is depicted as the latest in a series of imperialistic powers eager to plunder Africa's natural resources, and corrupt the African leaders who are eager to play along (Dahir, 2020). In 2020, following an article in *The Economist*, *China is the real sick man of Asia* (Mead, 2020), about the ravages of the Wuhan virus (COVID-19), China revoked the press cards of three international journalists in China. Can these current events also be called the 'yellow peril'? Or is it just another case of discrimination because China's pride has been hurt? I think such a contradictory mentality of pride and inferiority is also one of the reasons why Asians are looking for European fair skin.

In May 2002, CNN reported in depth on this topic. In the article *Skin Deep: Dying*



Figure 4.16: Angelica Dass, *Humanæ*, photographic, 2012.

to be white, it described how women in Asia will use various skin whitening products despite negative health consequences. In March 2007, a news report in Taiwan stated that two female students vomited and passed out after visiting a clinic to inject a ‘whitening needle’ in order to whiten their skin. At the ‘Whitening Summit’ held in Hong Kong in 2008, doctors and professors from Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan pointed out that the age of Asian women using whitening products has dropped significantly to 15-20 years (Ou-Yang, 2009). In addition to the Asian longing for fairness, the ‘index of nigrescence’ of the British race proposed by John Beddoe in the 19th century was also controversial, because his purpose was to prove that the Irish were ‘black’ or ‘more black’ than the English. His classification is based on hair and eye colour, not skin colour (Lassiter, 2009). French doctor Paul Broca created a scientific tool for inserting pre-existing racial stereotypes into scientifically certified literal meanings (Lassiter, 2009). He designed a table with four squares (red, black,

yellow and white) for finding the closest colour to an individual's skin in an attempt to standardise skin tone. After this, other scientists tried to improve this experiment by using different colours and materials. By the end of the nineteenth century, a small wooden gyroscope became a popular alternative experimental method: some black, white, red, and yellow paper disks were placed on top of the gyroscope, and those paper disks would be mixed together when the top of the spiral was turned. The subject under measurement placed one arm on a table as the spinner turned, and the researchers adjusted the paper tray's colour ratio until the tray was the same as the subject's skin tone, with science endorsing the stereotype. I think this stereotype should be broken. In contemporary art, Angelica Dass's work *Humanæ* (2012) [Fig. 4.16] uses 4,000 photo portraits to explain that any skin tone is just as beautiful. In my research, what the audience sees is a painting, a story, and most importantly, a person, and I hope that the audience will not only see the skin colour. In a sense, the whole content of a portrait is a model. I hope that when we see a person, we don't just see a person's skin colour and instantly establish cultural meanings about a person's appearance. It is impossible and extremely difficult to treat everyone equally, but at least, through this research, we are able to understand a person's many layers from a variety of perspectives.

Chapter 5

Light and skin colour

In this chapter, I want to further discuss the influence of light on skin colour and analyse the cultural significance of skin colour in the context of art history. More importantly, I will discuss the colours I used when painting in different lighting conditions and environments and the cultural differences between the East and the West I observed in the interviews.

In my research, human skin colour is actually greatly affected by light. In the state of backlight, human skin colour often appears grey and blue, such as my works *Shengchu Su* (Chinese) [Fig. 5.1], *Sam Maesschalck* (Belgium) [Fig. 5.2] and Claude Monet's *La Promenade* (1875) [Fig. 5.3]. This last painting depicts a scene of a mother and son walking on the grass on a sunny morning. A lady with a parasol stands in the middle-right of the picture, and a little boy is far to the left. At the bottom of the canvas is the meadow, whose delicate brushwork reflects the changes in the backlight and the shadow



Figure 5.1: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Shengchu Su*, 2018, oil on canvas.

of the sunny grass. Among these shadows, the lady holding the parasol is surrounded by bright sunlight. There are bright white strokes above and behind her umbrella, and a touch of yellow visual focus at the waist, which complements the yellow wild flowers underneath. The whole painting has only a few colours such as yellow, blue, white, green, and brown, giving a sense of tranquility and comfort. The shape of the parasol and the grey-green tone may seem a little abrupt and oppressive at first glance, but the overall look is harmonious. It not only echoes the meadow at the feet of the characters, but also integrates with the blue of the sky. In addition, the reflection of light on the



Figure 5.2: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Sam Maeschalck*, 2019, oil on canvas.



Figure 5.3: Claude Monet, *The Promenade, Woman with a Parasol*, 1875, oil on canvas.



Figure 5.4: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Tsveta Hristova*, 2018, oil on canvas.

woman's left arm, skirt, and face is wonderful.

My work *Tsveta Hristova* [Fig. 5.4] is an interesting example, because she lives in a dark basement, in a small dim room. As you can clearly see from the work, her skin tone has a clear yellow-green underneath the intersection of light and dark. This light-dark boundary from the eyebrow to the nose to the lips of the woman lying in Lucian Freud's *Hotel Bedroom* (1954) [Fig. 5.5] also clearly shows the blue-green tones. We use such a blue-grey or blue-green to realistically present the skin colour we see.

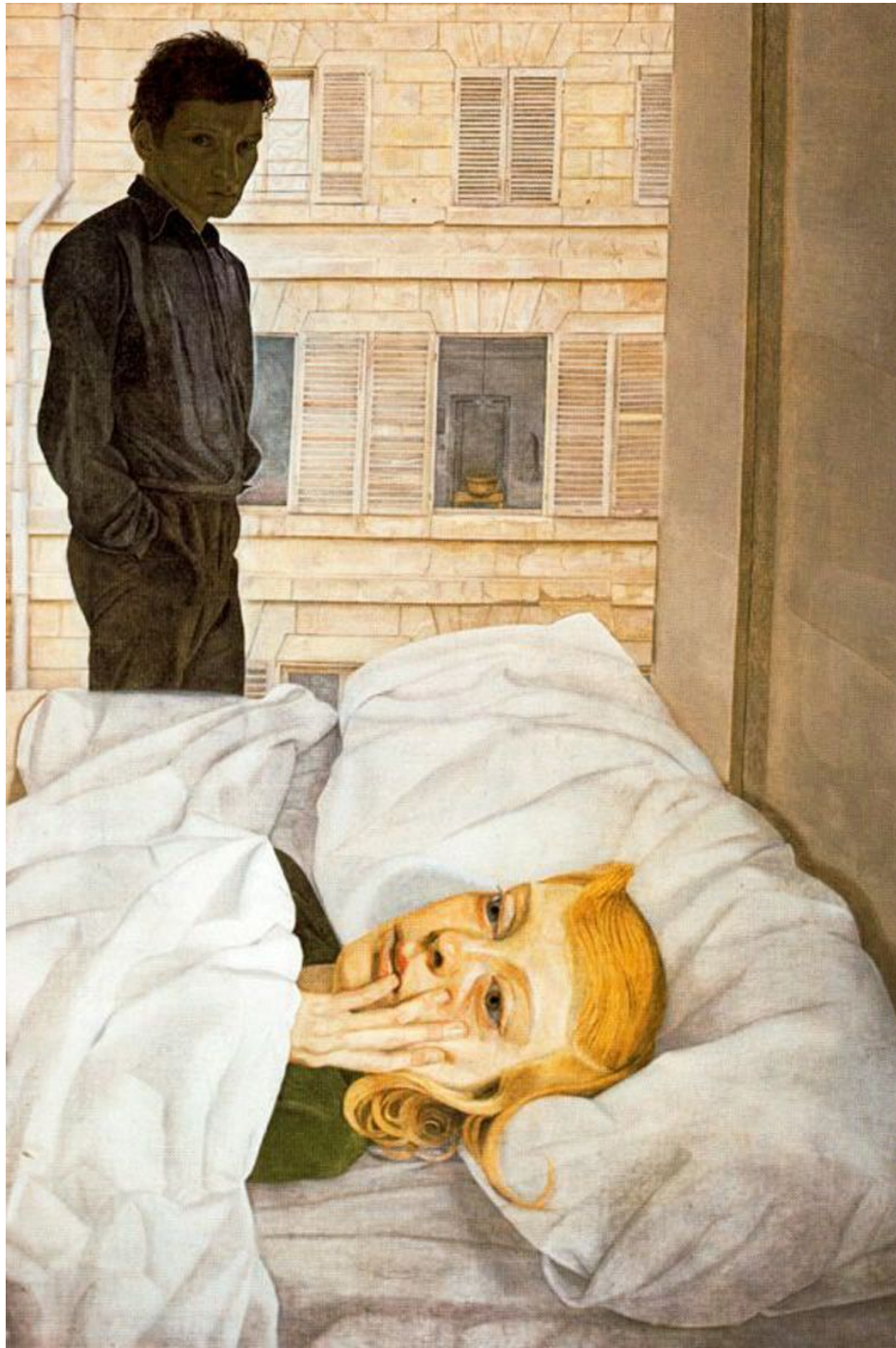


Figure 5.5: Lucian Freud, *Hotel Bedroom*, 1954, oil on canvas.



Figure 5.6: Olafur Eliasson, *Room for one colour*, 1997, light, size depends on venue.

Untrained artists may not use such colours to depict skin tone. This is simply because people may often draw what they think they see rather than what they actually see. What is thought of as common sense often limits and frames cognition. For example, the stereotypes of people with different skin colours often limit people's thinking, which may be dangerous. The colour of skin changes drastically under the light, which can be clearly seen in the work *Room for one colour* (1997) [Fig. 5.6] by Olafur Eliasson. Under the shroud of yellow light, everyone becomes a black and yellow image. In my work *Thomas Simons* [Fig. 5.7], you can see that the yellow light hits the human body, and the human skin colour is improved, showing bright orange and orange red. In addition to being affected by light, the skin colour of people in oil painting works is also often affected by the subjective consciousness of the painter. Vladimir Tretchikoff's *The Chinese Girl*, *The Green Lady* (1952) [Fig. 5.8] is a very interesting example. The face



Figure 5.7: YunChu Chang, *100 Rooms - Thomas Simons*, 2017, oil on canvas.

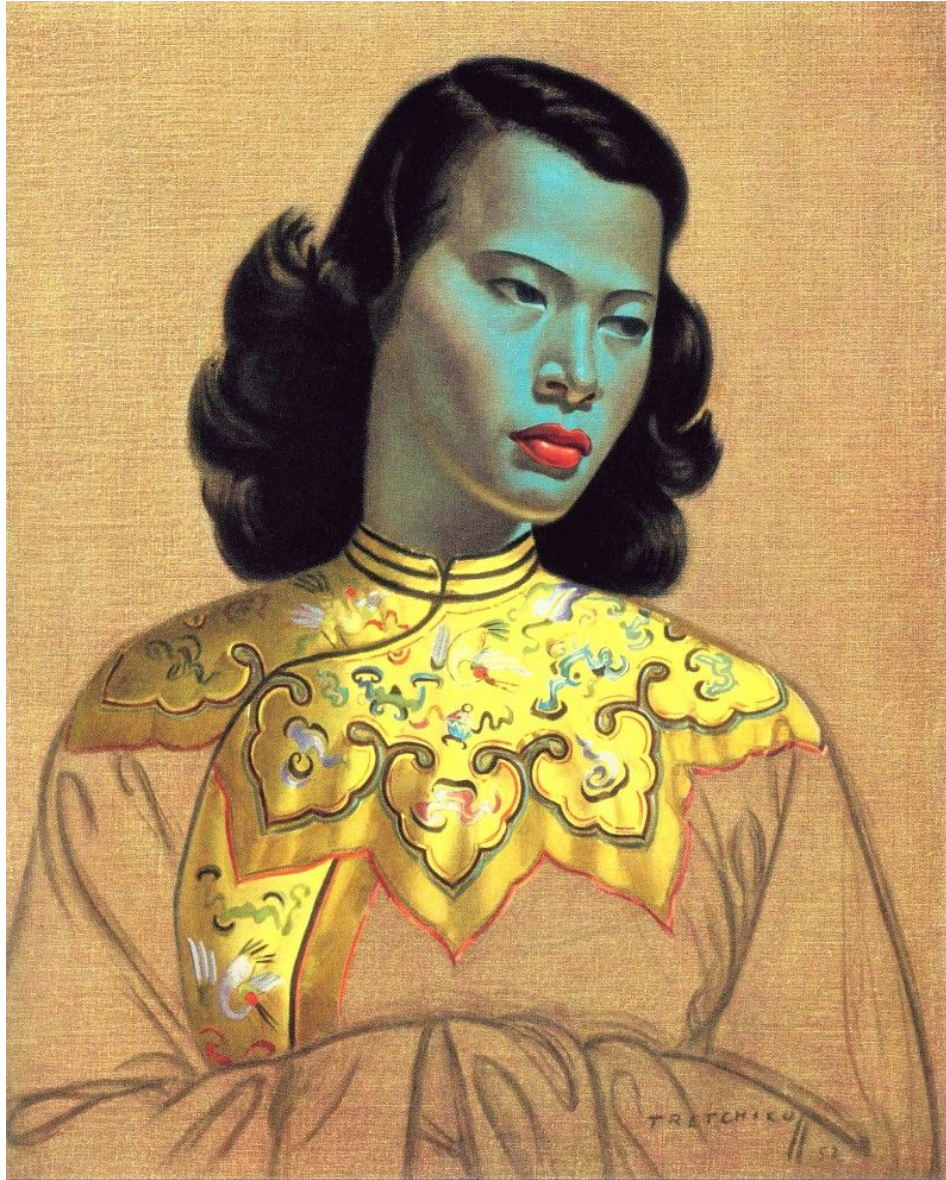


Figure 5.8: Vladimir Tretchikoff, *The Chinese Girl, The Green Lady*, 1952.

of an oriental woman shows a bright green colour and the bright yellow clothes on her body show a strong contrast. Such a painting was copied into a poster and is popular in the Western world. It is considered to be exotic.

A certain range of colours is characteristic of Lucian Freud's work – oatmeal, greys, whites, beiges, light yellow, creams, browns and blacks (Gayford, 2010, p.91). Those colours don't call attention to themselves. Freud's house and his clothes are the same. Freud (2004, Ibid) points out "In the end, nothing goes with anything. It's your taste that puts things together." These colours constitute a quiet tone in his work. We can also see the significant influence of light in his work. Martin Gayford (2010) quotes Freud in *Man with a Blue Scarf* on sitting for a portrait by him:

Historically, the development of the artist's studio is all about the provision of light, hence the high windows and the northerly aspect. A northern light provides the steadiest, most reliable illumination: with no disrupting dawn or sunset or confusing differences from morning to afternoon [...] the quality and direction of the light are fundamental importance. The lighting, to a considerable extent, makes the picture. If it alters, so does the image [...] for working, I like a north light that is cold and clear and constant. High, light cloud suits me well. When I read that the studio in Van Gogh's Yellow House faced south, I thought, he really was mad. (Gayford, 2010, pp. 226-227)

In daily life, makeup can also easily change skin colour. I have observed the interesting phenomenon that the same foundation may have only five shades in Taiwan, but up to thirty shades in the United Kingdom [Fig. 5.9]. The Asia region is convinced that 'one



Figure 5.9: M.A.C foundation advertising in Taiwan and UK.

white can cover three ugly’ (一白遮三醜) which means if you are very white, even with features that may be considered unattractive in Asia, for example small eyes, a collapsed nose and thick lips, a girl is still considered beautiful. I feel that the British people have a greater respect each person’s different skin colour, and generally the British people think that olive skin or sun-bronzed skin is sexier. Why is it considered ugly to have dark skin, small noses and thick lips in Asia? The answer seems to be related to Linnaeus in his *Systema Naturæ* (1735) classification. Compared to the Asian race, Europeans have fairer skin, larger eyes, larger noses and thinner lips, based on stereotypes. Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese official spent many years in India during the 16th century, wrote a report describing the Chinese saying “their women are very beautiful, but the eyes of men and women are very small, and men’s beards have only three or four hairs” (Barbosa, 2016). Very obviously, Asians are considered more beautiful if they have similar characteristics to Europeans and Americans. Is this beauty really based on aesthetics, or is it the desire for an imaginary superior species? Some English friends once mocked the Asian insistence that white is beauty as this is an outdated idea from



Figure 5.10: Makeup with fake tanned orange tone.



Figure 5.11: The pre-makeup and post-makeup effects that Taiwanese pursue.

the Victorian era. But in fact, in Asia only the rich can maintain fairness without being exposed to the sun, and only the rich in the UK can take a vacation to sunnier destinations and turn a bronze colour. Are these aesthetic standards based solely on money?

Some Europeans use body makeup with interesting orange colours because of such a worship of beauty, which also seems to show different perceptions of taste and class [Fig. 5.10]. I have also observed that oriental makeup emphasises natural sheerness, and girls spend two hours meticulously moisturising and controlling oil to paint bases, choosing foundations that are close to skin tone, and light orange or light pink eyeshadows and lipsticks [Fig. 5.11]. Oriental women rely on makeup to create the natural beauty of ‘without makeup’. Western women’s tendentious makeup style is more inclined to pursue a deeper contour, which will strengthen the highlights of the brow bone, nose and cheekbones, and darken the sides of the nose and shadow of the cheekbones.

Taiwanese females are influenced by Japanese and Korean culture, and their makeup pursues beauty without makeup and the cuteness of 'kawaii'¹. This may also be related to the fact that Taiwanese males like Japanese pornography. A large proportion of female protagonists in Japanese movies have childish looks and big breasts. This kind of image of the opposite sex is projected into the real aesthetic standards in daily life. When I lived in Taiwan, I was also educated and influenced by such social ethos and aesthetic concepts. I used to think girls were too fat if they were over 8 stone. Pretty girls must have fair skin and big eyes. This notion creates a lot of pressure, especially on adolescent girls. Also, Taiwanese do not usually like their naturally black or dark brown hair. On the street, you can see that eight out of ten people dye their hair in different shades of brown. This may show some kind of fashion for changing hair colours, but I think it's also a cult of Western light hair colours. When I visited Badziili and Boineelo Nthubu they told me that because of Western colonisation, Africans still to this day have the concept that their natural hair should not be exposed. This corresponds with the research of Peacock (2019) *African American Hair and Beauty: Examining Afrocentricity and Identity Through the Reemergence and Expression of Natural Hair*

¹In Japanese, the word literally means 'acceptable for affection' or 'possible to love' and has been translated as meaning 'cute,' 'adorable,' 'sweet,' 'precious,' 'pretty,' 'endearing,' 'darling,' and even 'little.' Its use varies in Japanese and can refer to babies, puppies, young people, clothing, and even senior citizens. In Japanese, one might refer to one's own grandma as kawaii, even if she's not decked out in pink bows and a frilly dress. "If you translate kawaii into English, it's 'cute,' but kawaii is much more emotional than cute," Tokyo fashion mogul Sebastian Masuda, hailed as the Godfather of Kawaii said. During the 1970s, Japan underwent a kawaii boom that seems, at times, to have never stopped. Over the past several decades, contemporary Japanese culture has spread globally through video games, anime, pop music and fashion. Japanese sensibilities, minus context, filter through, bringing new ideas and words. The non-Japanese-speaking world's encounter with kawaii is through colorful, hyper-cute fashion or art, and not through babies, puppies, and adorable grannies. The pink-pastel, covered-in-bows kawaii becomes the first definition and the default meaning. All the other meanings and uses fall by the wayside, and the word often takes on concentrated nuances. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as the word might have a more exact meaning in its borrowed state. Ashcraft, B. (2021) *The Meaning Of Kawaii-The Japanese word "kawaii" is much more than simply "cute"*, <https://kotaku.com/the-meaning-of-kawaii-1847641571>



Figure 5.12: YunChu Chang, *Room Project 1*, 2015, oil on canvas, 150×150cm.

in the 21st Century.

In contrast, I have observed that British girls are more confident about showing their hair colour and body curves. They often wear very tight leggings and very short tops. I felt a little embarrassed when I first arrived in the UK, as I felt like I was seeing nudes in public. But I think this is positive – anyone should be able to wear whatever they wish without being shy. I also like that British people don't publicly comment on other people's appearance and body shape. In Taiwan, even if you just



Figure 5.13: YunChu Chang, *Marta Ferri*, 2018, oil on canvas.

go to the breakfast shop, the clerk will say that you have gained weight recently and ask whether you would like to choose some healthier meals. Close relatives can also be very critical. I think this practice of commenting on the appearance of others is not only a manifestation of physical anxiety but also a manifestation of class consciousness. Research points out that obesity and poverty have an exponential correlation (Pickett and Wilkinson, 2010). During my visit to Badziili, he told me that in Africa you should be ashamed if your wife is skinny. He also told me that although I would be considered skinny in Africa, because of my race and skin colour, a man would need to exchange 50 cows to marry me, with each cow worth about five hundred dollars. Here, the value standard for measuring women has returned from body weight to skin colour and race.

Make-up can change the skin colour and construct a personal self-image which is also



Figure 5.14: YunChu Chang, *Nina Marleen*, 2018, oil on canvas.

a symbol of class identity. The girl in my early painting *Room Project 1* [Fig. 5.12] of *100 Rooms* insisted that she must at least apply liquid foundation to be willing to sleep. She said that this makes her feel safe. The girl in *Marta Ferri* [Fig. 5.13] carefully painted full makeup and bright lipstick and pretended to read an art and history book. Makeup is a kind of protection and armor for them. In my paintings, it was only these two girls who were careful about makeup, and the other girls faced the picture with a comfortable and natural attitude. This can be observed especially in the comfortable lying postures of *Nina Marleen* [Fig. 5.14], *Yuan Tian* [Fig. 5.15] and *Manli Huang* [Fig. 5.16]. In Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's representation of the girls working in the Moulin Rouge [Fig. 5.17], you can see the excessive white powder, exaggerated eyeliner and bright red lips. Can this be interpreted as a symbol of armour or beauty? Or the presentation of class identity? In my work, these comfortable women may not care about the absence of makeup in my work, but they definitely care about themselves when they



Figure 5.15: YunChu Chang, *Yuan Tian*, 2018, oil on canvas.



Figure 5.16: YunChu Chang, *Manli Huang*, 2019, oil on canvas.

appear in photos on the Internet. Many times, I contact my sitters via Facebook, but because the photos on the Internet are so different, I hardly recognise them when we actually meet. Once, after meeting a woman, Freud (2004, cited in Gayford, 2010, p.92) complained about the amount of makeup she had worn: “I felt I couldn’t see who I was talking to.” In 1929, Joan Riviere mentioned in *Womanliness as Masquerade* (1929): “a woman’s wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men.” I think there still exists a behaviour through which women think they are inferior to men and use makeup to cover their anxiety. I think women’s makeup in 2020, however, is more like a way to please yourself, or even a



Figure 5.17: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Al moulin rouge* (detail), 1892-95, oil on canvas, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

weapon. I don't deny that gender disadvantages still exist, but what interests me more are cultural disadvantages, perhaps even more so when Asians are involved. They are often 'weakened' and often materialised as potential sexual goods (Keevak, 2015).

Compared with works of art and literature, film is the most influential narrative invention of modern times. Here I briefly introduce some stereotypical examples of makeup in movies. Creators can easily 'implant' certain ideologies into viewers through images. When D.W. Griffith portrayed black parliamentarians as monkeys and made blacks play rapists in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), it boosted the morale of the Ku



Figure 5.18: David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, 1988, photo from 3rd October 2018 by SATOSHI.

Klux Klan, which had almost disappeared. Those in power discovered that once they had control over the movies, they could manipulate the minds of the nation, and even the minds of the entire human race. Conversely, through film and theatre we can also think differently about issues of race, gender and colour. David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1988) [Fig. 5.18] applied Eastern and Western cultural aesthetics to gender inversion and became a play that cleverly arranges culture and gender cognition.

He wrote *Face Value* (1993) because of a controversial cast of the musical *Miss Saigon* (1989), and a semi-autobiographical work *Yellow Face* (2007). The so-called 'yellow face' refers to a non-Asian white actor playing Orientals through makeup. For example, Tilda Swinton [Fig. 5.19] portrayed an Asian monk in *Doctor Strange* (2016). Similarly, in the early stages of the development of Hollywood films, there were almost no black characters in films, only characters portrayed by white actors



Figure 5.19: Tilda Swinton portrayed an Asian monk in *Doctor Strange*, 2016, Marvel studios.

using ‘blackface’. In the same way, in fact, in the past 100 years, Hollywood has portrayed African Americans, Latinos, and Asians with strong stereotypes. Perhaps the creators did not have malicious intentions at first, but these images affect the way the outside world understands people. Even Francis Fukuyama (2011), a political scientist, has commented on Hollywood’s prejudice, pointing out that *Blood Diamond* (2006) portrays black Africans unfairly, leading the outside world to think that black Africans are uncivilised and bloodthirsty by nature. The film producers, however, did not attempt to fully understand the history of Africa; similar brutal execution rituals were introduced to Africa by European colonists one or two hundred years earlier. Today, ‘blackface’ is considered completely unacceptable. White actors who play Asian

roles still hear criticism of this. This is the union of the political and the physiological. Whether in modern or ancient times, this union is used to legitimise one of the main sources of domination, and when domination is considered natural and established, it is no-longer subject to ethical scrutiny. Stereotypes can cause the outside world to belittle these groups, and they can also cause the discriminated group to feel self-deprecating. Sometimes this effect can be achieved by audio alone. For example, children from the African-American and Latino communities who watched Disney in the 1990s found that the main characters in *The Lion King* (1994) have standard white accents, while the voice representing them came from the villain, the Spotted Hyena. In recent years, Disney has become aware of similar issues and has decided to introduce actors of different races into mainstream blockbusters to play a range of roles, not just the villains. The advantage of this move is that children of different ethnicities can find their own role models from these movies. Of course, these businessmen are not making these changes entirely out of their sense of ‘corporate responsibility’. The success of films such as *Black Panther* (2018) proves that films with non-white viewpoints can also be successful.

Sigmund Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* (2002) developed a set of theories on body politics that base the development of human society on the gradual domination of nature, especially the need to control human sexual energy. For Freud’s system, dangerous and natural sex is at the core. This is not original, but a reaffirmation of the tradition of politicising the body to a physiological starting point. Body politics is first seen as being based on natural individuals, whose instincts must be conquered before cultural groups can emerge. The fundamental place of human existence in the world is a dialectical relationship, that is, the dialectical relationship between human existence

and the surrounding world in the process of satisfying needs and then creating values. The process of cultural collision and blending constitutes the relationship of class ranks because of intentional domination. Through this interaction we create ourselves at the individual and collective levels. Neither our organic nor social body can be considered natural. What we see as culture or nature in experience or theory is transformed under established norms. Dialectical relationships should not become more and more dominated by these dynamic processes. In these cultural and artistic works, the images represented in them unconsciously create our self-identity (Freud, 2002).

Before the end of the eighteenth century, no one tried to classify human beings by what we now call races. Western thought classifies the nations of the world in various ways, including the concept of ambiguous skin colours. But tags such as religion, language, clothing, and social custom often show racial differences, in addition to different combinations of climate, gender, or social class (Keevak, 2015). Studies have shown (Norton, 2008; Norton et al., 2007, 2016; Quillen et al., 2019) that ‘skin colour genes’ respond similarly to similar sun conditions. This study, and many others like it, show that skin colour is independent of other traits that characterise and classify people. So a person’s skin colour is actually irrelevant to other real or imagined racial characteristics (Jablonski, 2021).

In my opinion, the more openly inspected and discussed racial stereotypes are, the more likely this is to promote inter-ethnic understanding. Mutual understanding is more important today than ever before, and we need to acknowledge racial stereotypes in our hearts. Through artistic implementation, we observe that different skin colours and races are influenced by many different spatial and temporal factors. As human

beings, we should be able to grasp the ability to respect each other as unique living individuals. We still live the relationship of pride and inferiority, domination and want. We should think about the discipline that society and culture give us, and we must analyse the conscious human desire for domination. We must consider domination as a result of nurture, not nature.

Part 2

Space

Chapter 6

Spatial theory and art:

Using my artwork to explore the relationship between space and existence in the digital age

In this chapter, I use the characteristics of Heidegger's fourfold structure: of veiling and unveiling, absence and presence, concealing and unconcealing, sheltering and clearing to locate the truth of human existence. I also compare this idea with the concept of space in *Tao Te Ching*. I then expand on how these concepts can be put into practice during the creative process.

Before the 'Body' (discussed previously) existed in its current form, it was an organism with a sensory experience in the world: as prominent philosopher Martin Heidegger (1927) said, 'being-in-the-world'. By analysing the dynamic process of painting in private spaces from an ethnographic perspective, this chapter will explore the relationship between people and the environment. It will argue that space theory

developed by Martin Heidegger and in Taoism can provide a framework for cyberspace in my paintings.

First, I use Heidegger's concept of space to explain my presence in my painting process. In 1955, Heidegger's speech *On the Question of Being* (published in 1998), suggested a concept of lines (Heidegger, 1998, p.292) that travel in a space interwoven by the 'locale', and the 'locale' guides everything to 'gather' together. This lets the 'thing' form, and shelters its essence. Heidegger called this concept the fourfold. Within this concept, 'things' are not 'things'; they have 'no locale', 'no direction'. This 'thing' acquires meaning in a space co-constructed and interwoven by the four dimensions. The understanding of 'things' is also the understanding of being. Such understanding must be through a place other than space. This is not the physical or geometric sense of space, but an abstract theoretical attitude and a tacit understanding of the space we occupy. This space, which is hidden in daily life but intertwined with various elements, is a kind of 'present-at-hand' (Heidegger, 1927). My artistic action intervenes in the sitter's private space to bring out these invisible things. I see through the eyes of an artist, revealing the totality of involvement and significance of 'ready-to-hand' (Heidegger, 1927). The 'ready-to-hand' and 'present-at-hand' levels represent the fundamental structure of Dasein's 'being-in-the-world', with the more fundamental of the two, 'readiness-to-hand', being organised and arranged through Dasein's 'Care'. And through my movement in this space, I know where I am. Each sitter has their own place, where I co-exist with them. Heidegger (1962, p.138) believed that in 'being-there' people inhabit the locale, and in 'being-in', have 'directionality' and 'de-severance'. De-severance makes the farness vanish, and brings objects close. In the 1950s, Heidegger saw that all the distances in time and space were shortening, entering into what he

called uniform 'distancelessness'. When the far and the near disappear at the same time, the world enters what he called a 'worldless' state. Therefore, Heidegger attempts to explore the 'object' through the interpretation of the 'fourfold', thereby changing the relationship between man and the world. He (1971, p.179) argued that the fourfold, as the convergence of all things, is where the world can become the world, where things can have a place and gain meaning.

In *Tao Te Ching*, the five dimensions, 'people, earth, sky, Tao and nature', also constitute a meaningful world view. In Chapter 25, Lao Tzu (1997) said:

There was something undefined and complete,
coming into existence before Heaven and Earth.
How still it was and formless, standing alone, and undergoing no change,
reaching everywhere and in no danger of being exhausted!
It may be regarded as the Mother of all things.
I do not know its name, and I give it the designation of the Tao.
Making an effort to give it a name, I call it The Great.
Great, it passes on in constant flow.
Passing on, it becomes remote.
Having become remote, it returns.
Therefore the Tao is great, Heaven is great,
Earth is great, and the sage king is also great.
In the universe there are four that are great,
and the sage king is one of them.
Man takes his law from the Earth.

Earth takes its law from Heaven.

Heaven takes its law from the Tao.

The law of the Tao is its being what it is.

(Translated by James Legge, 1891, *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 25)

In this extract, we can see that Lao Tzu said that the most fundamental thing is Tao itself, and this process of changing all things produces nature. This process has four major forces at work - Tao, heaven, earth, and people. The five interacting forces mentioned by Lao Tzu are just like Heidegger's fourfold. The things that their two theories say are without physical objects. This non-substantiality does not eliminate the substance and objectivity of the thing, on the contrary, the thing explained needs to be discussed in the in-between. In other words, a thing is a concrete historical aggregation, so a thing is no longer an imaginary object, but a natural construction. This kind of natural construction, whether in Heidegger's theory or Lao Tzu's theory, clarifies the "limitation" and "absolute boundary" of human beings in this natural material world. So when the two theories are talking about things, they are actually discussing people. In these theories, the discussion of the position and destiny of human beings in the world, is referring to the relationship between human beings, the surrounding world and the natural environment.

These two spatial theories are particularly important in my artwork, as my work reflects a specific moment in time and space, where everything is connected and everything is fluid. At the moment of my creation, the sitters are moving, and the paint is moving in my hands. Everything echoes the abundant vitality of this fluidity and space, something mentioned thousands of years ago in Jing Hao's (荆浩) *A Note on the*

Art of Brush (筆法記) (c.855-915). Hao was a Chinese landscape painter and art theorist of the *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms* period in Northern China. As an artist, he is often cited along with his pupil, Guan Tong, as one of the most critical figures in the development of the style of monumental landscape painting which appeared towards the end of the Five Dynasties period. “We read, to achieve Qi, the heart/mind and the brush are in perfect coordination, decisively appropriating Xiang; Yun, hides the traces of the brush stroke to make Xiang appear, and create an effect which is not drab and common” (Munakata and Munakata, 1974). Qi is the outline of Xiang (real image), while Yun hides away the pointedness of line. (Hui, 2021, p.173)

In my painting process, I have to concentrate, not to depict form, but to promote the flow of energy, brushstrokes and power. It’s a flowing, reciprocal dynamic; present-in-the-moment intention is in constant flux (Guo, 1963, p.17). The flow of Qi in space is shown on the canvas, so the canvas becomes more than just a simple likeness. Both Heidegger’s fourfold and Taoism’s five dimensions attempt to explain how all phenomena in this world flow together, interacting and intertwining with each other. Through my fluid and dynamic style of painting, I integrate many of these flowing elements to portray the existence of people in the world. It is as though the two concepts of space, Heidegger and Taoism, are embodied on my canvas.

Using the oil paintings of the *100 Rooms* project as the object of analysis, I explore the relationship between space and existence in the era of Internet technology, and how this affects painting in many ways. In this era of Internet technology and the pandemic, everything is online and virtualised. The time spent in private space has become longer, and the exploration of space and personal existence has become more important. In this

chapter, I examine the implications of the relationship between my oil painting process and people's activities in the space of the private room. My paintings try to enter the private space of others, and show the connection between contemporary people and cyberspace, exploring the physical, philosophical and psychological distance between contemporary people, emphasising the unique and fluid nature of the artistic process in a private space.

I use Heidegger's phenomenological theory of the spatial significance of the surrounding world, Dasein's spatiality and Eastern 'Feng Shui' (風水) to analyse the significance of existence in space to contemporary intellectuals. How does the space theory exhibit differently in the context of East and West? From this theoretical perspective, this chapter attempts to point out that because of the changes in interpersonal alienation and living space brought about by Internet technology, the primitive relationship between people and between man and nature is in a state of incompatibility and hostility. In the process of my painting, I observed the interrelation between space and people which can be explained through the theories of Heidegger and Taoism. Both concepts treat human existence and space as one. My artworks also try to cross the bridge between humans and the space they occupy, to reconcile human beings with a world that they seem to have deviated from, starting with a single sitter. More specifically, Chapters 7 and 8 attempt to use ethnographic materials and Heidegger's theory to show and explain the 'dwelling' of the technological age and the human way of life. Exploring the activities that constitute typical meanings in private space and cyberspace can reveal some of these values.

I use Heidegger's phenomenological theory of the spatial significance of the surround-

ing world, Dasein's spatiality. According to Heidegger, when 'Dasein' is 'being-in-the-world', the 'be...ing' here already expresses the meaning of space, and the 'surrounding' of the 'surrounding world' also expresses space and tools (things), so it is more related to space. The word 'Dasein' occupies a very important place in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). 'Dasein' in common usage in modern German means 'to live', 'to be' and 'to survive'. In Heidegger's argument, it does not refer to 'survival' in general, but refers specifically to 'people' (beings who are aware of their own existence), and their ways of living. The word 'Dasein' is translated as 'presence'. The usual meaning of 'Da' is: 'there', 'here', 'because'. However, Heidegger endowed some more profound meanings to the idea, to express the unique 'being' of 'beings' such as 'human beings'. 'Sein' (being) is neither internal or external to Dasein; it is a 'being of itself' that makes Dasein itself (in its being) and has a being relationship. His theory particularly emphasises the relationship between nature and Dasein, especially when considering the fourfold, where he focuses on the mapping and existence of everything. The same Taoist concept of Feng Shui also discusses the mutual influence between people and the environment. The Oriental Feng Shui is used to analyse the relationship between human and space environments, find out how to increase the advantages and reduce the disadvantages, and try to make people and space compatible. These two different ways of exploring space to define the logic of existence in the East and the West are the theoretical perspectives of this chapter.

This research is restricted to the study of Lancaster students, and pays special attention to the recording and analysis of their values of security, individualisation and privacy in their room. I initially regarded the room and the sitter as the subject, but unexpectedly, the interviewees exposed a lot of their own values and more private

experiences. I use interview data to point out how cyberspace and private space shape the culture and values of contemporary young people. This is explored in detail in Chapter 7: *Cyberspace in my oil paintings*.

Heidegger (1971) said that dwelling is the mode of human beings. According to Wheeler (2011), writing in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the term ‘dwelling’ appears in *Being and Time*, where it is used to capture the distinctive manner in which Dasein is in the world. The term continues to play this role in later philosophy, but in texts such as *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (Heidegger, 1971), it is reinterpreted and made philosophically central to our understanding of Being. This reinterpretation of, and the new emphasis on, dwelling is bound up with the idea from the contributions of Being as appropriation. To explain: where one dwells is where one is at home, where one has a place. This sense of place is what grounds Heidegger’s existential notion of spatiality, as developed in later philosophy (Malpas, 2006). Usual human activities reveal the meaning of things, and through the dwellings of things, people have a place to place themselves.

In the East and West, because of the different climates and conditions, we have constructed different architectural forms. However, in both cultures, in order to live, we prepare places and arrange things. These places and things construct and contain our activities. These places and things establish a relationship with each other, as well as between themselves, their inhabitants and their surrounding environment. According to Wheeler (2011), in dwelling, then, Dasein is located within a set of sense-making practices and structures, with which it is familiar. This way of unravelling the phenomenon of dwelling enables us to see more clearly—and more concretely—what

is meant by the idea of Being as an event/appropriation. Being is an event in that it takes (appropriates) place (where one is at home, and one's sense-making practices and structures build the meaning of a person) (Polt, 1999, cited in Malpas, 2006, p.148).

In the East, there is also a concept of exploring the relationship between the environment and people: Feng Shui. Feng Shui deals with 'Qi', which refers to "light, colour, shape, shadow, sound, heat, magnetism and electricity" (Bruun, 2008). These 'Qi' create life in the placement of buildings and objects. They create balance and stability, and Feng Shui is a concept that considers people as part of the world. Heidegger's interpretation of existence considers that people occupy a space in the world, which is ultimately closely related to the reinterpretation of the meaning of the world. This can be seen in a significant passage from Heidegger's 1954 piece, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (Heidegger, 1971). Human being consists in dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth. But 'on the earth' already means 'under the sky'. Both of these also mean "remaining before the divinities" and include a "belonging to men's being with one another." By a primal oneness the four—earth and sky, divinities and mortals—belong together in one. That is to say, human beings live above the earth and below the sky, between gods and mortals at the same time.

These structures are not independent but are phenomena from an underlying unity. In *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Heidegger calls this the fourfold. The fourfold is the transformed notion of world that applies within the later work. The fourfold's mirroring, as Heidegger describes it, speaks to the 'Gestell' of modern technology. The fourfold's way of gathering is different from Gestell, because 'people' or 'things' are not

just resources. On the contrary, the existence of the ‘thing’ depends on the interactive mapping activities between various dimensions, and continuously develops. In such a fourfold concept, things are not exhausted, but are always produced. And such a concept allows everyone to maintain their independence and at the same time be one. Art is such a field, trying to make everything appear and hide, separate and become one. This field is an ‘in-between’ where things appear, a place of accommodation and a place of intertwining. On the one hand, where the fourfold accommodates the interweaving, the thing is ‘presencing’; at the same time, because the thing is present, the fourfold is revealed.

As I entered the private spaces of my sitters and painted, I learned that the relationship between these spaces and existence is not simple or one-way, due to the cultivation and construction of many different spaces. This whole process flows through space and time. By building their spaces, people have structured the world and established their own position within it, becoming someone with identity and history. People have established material support through daily life, occupied the world, and understood the specificity of their lives reflected in space, that is, the materiality with historical significance. Today, this characteristic is particularly related to cyberspace. This construction is the basis for the emergence of subjectivity, the basis for identity and historical habitation, and today this subjectivity is also inseparable from cyberspace and art. Entering the individual spaces of my sitters, and experiencing the creative process of painting them, I began to understand this overall interlocking and mutually compatible relationship. The whole process is active, the sitters are full of vitality, the air in the space is flowing, and the world of the Internet is alive. In my artworks, I try to reveal that the world contained under this flowing space is also the place where the

so-called ‘existence’ and ‘truth’ of human beings take place. A real work of art does not copy or reproduce anything, but shows something.

In *The Essence of Truth* (1932), Heidegger claimed that truth is an argument, and it is necessary to rely on a deeper disclosure of things to bring phenomena into a state of appearance, which is the transcendent effect of Dasein (Heidegger, 2002). Dasein and the world have long met, and have always met, and fundamentally can never be separated. Dasein possesses a transcendent free drift, continually tracing other things from their purely factual state back to their fundamental existential state. The transcendence of Dasein makes it ‘in-between’. Dasein is like a ‘clearing’ in a forest or a field of encounter, it is neither subject nor object, it is a natural existence of subject and object. In early Heidegger theory, the most fundamental quality of a thing is that it interacts with us in some way before we have any prescriptive knowledge of it. And what must happen to make our communication with the world possible? The unique ‘being’ of Dasein is to understand ‘being’ itself, and the process of understanding its own medium of existence, which is basically ‘being-in-the-world’. As a form of being, it must connect to other things, and this ‘bound-upness’ with other things makes things reveal themselves. Heidegger declared in *Nietzsche* (1981, p.109) that we must let what is before us appear as it is, with its own status and value; we must make what we encounter free to keep its own way; we must allow and endow the qualities that belong to it, and also allow the qualities that belong to us. I think being in things is the best way to face them directly.

This is what I have tried to do in my *100 Rooms* project. I am used to painting directly with oil paint, which is still a creative medium used by many people, but life-

drawing seems to have become an ancient and outdated technique. The artistic concept of contemporary artists tends to be of greater importance than artistic technology. Since Marcel Duchamp reached the peak of this concept in the early twentieth century, the ratio of the two has always tended to be more concept-heavy. The world contained under this flowing creative space is simultaneously a kind of Gestell, but differs from the practical purpose of modern technology in artistic works. The production of artworks is of course also a kind of technology or skill. Compared with technology, the skill in art does not emphasise a practical activity but an attempt to ‘go towards the thing itself’, how to move towards an ‘in-between’ state of ‘*Ereignis* – Event’. Both technology and art were called ‘technology’ by the Greeks, not because they are both practical activities but because there is a kind of ‘*Wissen* – Knowing’ experience in them. Heidegger emphasised that ‘to know means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing.’ In this ‘to know’ and ‘widest sense of seeing’, we apprehend what is present. This act of ‘seeing’ also shows the actor’s perspective on how to understand and practice.

In my discussion, the whole concept revolves around the private living spaces of the younger generation. Space and people have a direct mutual influence on the existence of each other. This kind of existence has been observed in the process and results of my artwork. Moreover, this concept of existence is consistent with the understanding of the space theories of Heidegger and Taoism. According to Heidegger, the surrounding world space refers to Dasein. The space of ‘to-be-at-hand’ (*zuhandsein*) refers to its position, and the space of ‘being present’ (*vorhandenheit seiendes*) refers to the location of the place. Things with different ways of being have different spatiality. Dasein’s being is different from them, so it also has a special spatial meaning. Dasein’s spatial structure is ‘being-in-the-word’. Its ‘being in’ refers to existence, and existence means that it

understands the world and, in its possibility, reaches the things in the world. Under Dasein's way of existence, things in the world become 'zuhandenheit', 'present-at-hand' appliances. 'Present-at-hand' means close to the hand, so the appliance has a spatial meaning—its orientation. In other words, through the existence of Dasein, things in the world gain spatial meaning. Dasein's spatiality does not refer to its 'location' or 'residence' but refers to the space it gives. This kind of given space can also be called 'einräumen' or 'making room'. For this purpose, existence is 'making room' (Heidegger 2019, cited in Chen, 2017). It can be understood from this that Heidegger's existence is a kind of existence in space. Therefore, as an artist, I enter the space and I witness the existence. This kind of existence is fluid, spatial, and temporal.

Heidegger's *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* article published in 1954 is related to the fourfold (*Geviert*) thought (Heidegger, 1971). People live between sky, earth, divinities and mortals (*himmel, erde, gottliche, sterbliche*). For Heidegger, 'living' is a task. People who experience no place to live must change and begin to learn how to settle. People set up the world through building, establishing their own place in the world, becoming someone with identity and history. In Heidegger's *Age of the World Picture* (1938), he claims that when we say the word 'image', the first thing that comes to our mind is a picture of something. According to this, The World Picture is about a picture of the whole of being. But in reality, a picture of the world means a lot more. By the term 'world image' we mean the world itself, the whole of being, as it is decisive and binding for us. 'Image' here does not refer to a copy, but to what we can hear in this sentence: 'to know something like the back of the hand'. What this sentence is saying is that the thing itself stands before us as it is known to us. To understand something means to consider the thing itself, and its history, with everything contained within it and

everything around it. However, there is not yet a definitive stipulation on the nature of the image. ‘To know something like the back of our hand’ means not only that being is fundamentally put before us, but that ‘being-in’ everything that it contains and that coexists within it – exists before us as a system. The phrase ‘in an image’ (*im bilde sein*), means ‘knowing something, being ready, being prepared for something.’ Where the world becomes an image, the whole of being is identified as that which humanity prepares for. Accordingly, human beings bring this image to the front of their world, in order to possess the world of the image. So, in essence, the world image does not mean an image about the world, but how the world is grasped as an image. The whole of being is then viewed in the following way: beings exist only insofar as they are placed by those who represent and make. Where the image of the world appears, an essential decision about the whole of beings is realised. The being of beings is sought and found in the represented state (*vorgestelltheit*) of beings.

The artworks in which people show their existence in space are found in the West. I think this can be seen with Jan van Eyck’s *The Betrothal of the Arnolfini* (1434) [Fig. 6.1]. In this painting, the artist became the perfect eye-witness in the truest sense of the term. The artist not only witnessed an important moment in the life experience of others, but the space surrounding them in this work also has meaning. The betrothed in the picture give the meaning to the background space in this painting. The arrangement of all the spaces and objects in the background of this picture have also been carefully designed by the artist to create a meaning of existence, showing a mutual understanding between Dasein and ‘being-in-the-world’. In this conception of understanding, people are still a central subject, with space and other things surrounding them. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Leon Battista Alberti wrote a treatise on perspective, *De*



Figure 6.1: Jan van Eyck, *The betrothal of the Arnolfini*, 1434, oil on wood, National Gallery, London.

Pictura (1435) (Alberti, 2011), in which he proposed that painting was created from a fixed point of view and according to certain visual laws in a flat picture: a picture of a virtual three-dimensional space. The Renaissance perspective as an advanced human-centred way of looking at the world, as a value of scientific rationality, was strictly observed for hundreds of years. It combined art with the laws of scientific perspective to organise two-dimensional pictures. Although painters use this method, they are not satisfied with the fixed system of perspective space, or the limitations of human vision. The so-called ‘viewpoint’ in perspective defines the specific spatial relationship between the painter and the scene in the painting. Although different artists have some different techniques, such a spatial relationship cannot be separated from the viewing

perspective. In such a relation of being, man ‘occupies’ a place.

Compared with Heidegger, Taoist thought has a similar concept of existence. In Taiwan, the traditional concept is that all things in the world have a spirit, and this spirit is called Qi. The sky, earth, mountains and forests all gather their respective Qi. If these Qi have been cultivated for millions of years, they will have a divine or human nature. The Human is one of the creatures born because of these Qi. The Human was born because of the sky and the earth (the whole universe), so is part of the sky and the earth (the whole universe). In Taiwanese culture, we use ‘*Tian*’ (sky) and ‘*Di*’ (earth, land) as a synonym for the entire universe. As Heidegger says: “Things with different ways of being have different spatiality. Dasein’s being is different from them, so it also has a special spatial meaning. Dasein’s spatial structure is ‘Being-in-the-world’. Its ‘being in’ refers to existence, and existence means that it understands the world and, in his possibility, reaches the things in the world.” (Heidegger, 2019).

Existence in Taoism is more than just understanding the world, it is being part of the world. There is no one without the world. If there were no beings in the world and this dimension, we would not exist because we were born within this dimension. This concept of existence can also be evidenced by Chinese painting.

Shanshui, the Chinese word for landscape, is a compound of the two symbols for mountain and water, indispensable elements of historical shanshui painting. Its significance lies more in its transformational potential for connecting the individual to the world than in the accurate rendering of a particular landscape. Even in contemporary art in China, which is dominated by the human figure and supposedly liberated from the burden of tradition, there are obvious elements of traditional

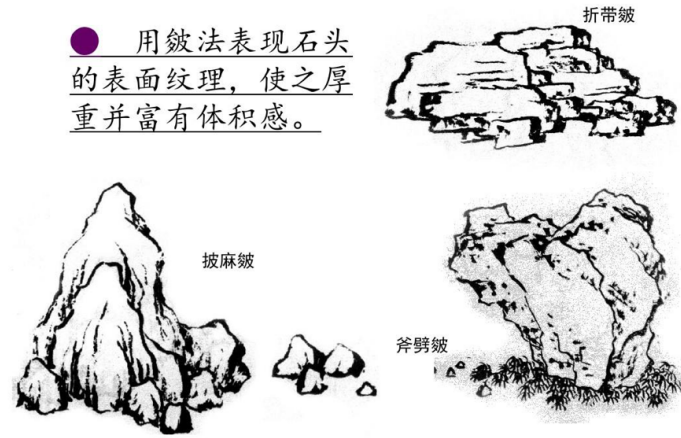


Figure 6.2: Stone practice tracing example.

mountain-water painting, which is deeply rooted in the nation's culture (Ai, 2011).

When I started to study shanshui painting, the teacher gave me examples of stones in the first class [Fig. 6.2]. After the stone practice, the second lesson was how to draw a tree. After the teacher taught me how to draw bark and branches, she taught me about five different common leaf painting methods. In the third class, the teacher began to teach me how to arrange stones and trees on paper. In the fourth class, the teacher taught me how to draw a 'dotted character'— a character as small as an ant. The role of these characters is only to increase the level of change in shades of ink. Their function is the same as the dark black moss added to the stone at the end. During this whole learning process, as a child born in a city, I had never seen the giant stone I practiced drawing. I had never seen the pine trees or cypress trees I drew, or some other trees that I still don't know [Fig. 6.3]. However, I think this whole practice process proves that everything is just a part of this world. If a piece of paper is the space of a world, we can create some stones and some trees to form a tangible and visible world.



Figure 6.3: Trees and leaves practice tracing example.

The vacant part naturally becomes water, wind and clouds. People are also part of this world, but obviously not the most important part. Human existence in this Chinese painting space is just an existence that adds some interest to the space, like moss.

All I have learned are the most basic symbols, which are just metaphors in shanshui painting. Yun Shouping (1633-1690) (Yuk, 2021, p.174) said the best shanshui painting would be one in which of a hundred thousand trees, none of the brush strokes is tree; of a hundred thousand mountains, none of the brush strokes is mountain; of a hundred thousand brush strokes, none of the brush strokes is a brush stroke. In a good shanshui painting when you seem to see something then entities appear on the painting, but you don't actually see anything. You don't seem to see anything, but you see something. This method liberates both the painter and the painting toward the infinite [Fig. 6.4].

In this research, my works still take portraits of people as the main body in form, and

it seems that people are still the main body of the world. But this study is conceptually different from traditional Western portraiture. It is not a manifestation of the absolute and inevitability of God or human power, nor is it like Descartes' object theory or the ancient entity theory of Plato and Aristotle. On the contrary, the picture created by the active person and their environment in this study presents the limitation, pluralism and naturalness of human existence revealed by Heidegger's fourfold and Lao Tzu's natural object theory. I think the positive meaning derived from such a concept of nature, "Tao produces all things in the world", is that no longer one thing dominates all things. On the contrary, all things are related and allowed to grow and operate naturally. Therefore, the painting process I adhere to in this research also actively reflects such core ideas. In the next chapter, I will explore how technological space and bodies are presented in my paintings under this context.

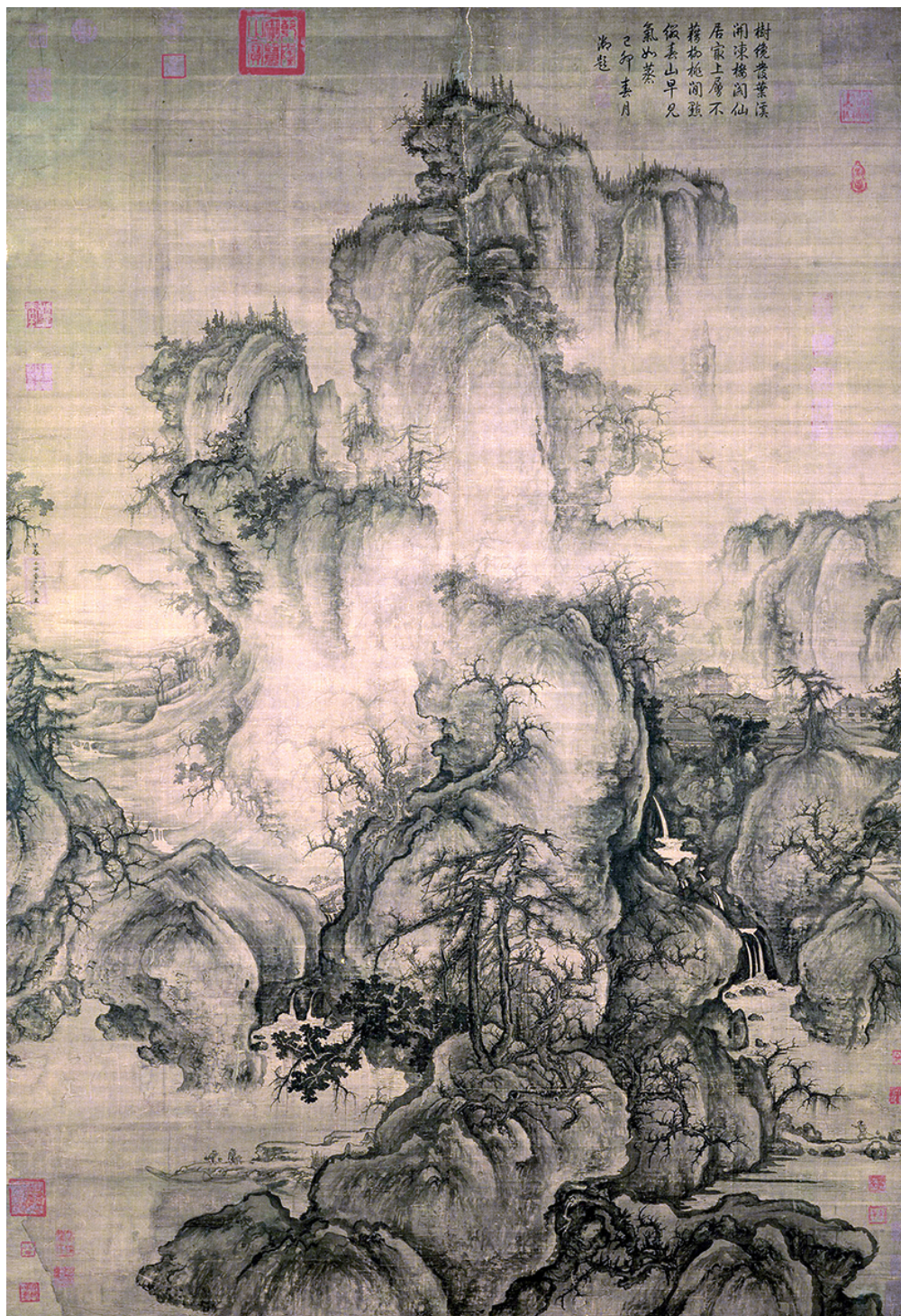


Figure 6.4: Go Xi, *Early Spring*, 1072, Ink on paper, 158.3×108cm, National Palace Museum, Taiwan.

Chapter 7

Cyberspace in my oil paintings

In this chapter I will explain how I use painting to visualise the invisible cyberspace. Subsequently, I will describe the changes and disciplines that modern technological life has brought to people's bodies and living spaces that I have observed in the process of artistic creation. I will also explain the necessity of my method of producing field artworks through Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Taoist theory.

The concept of body discipline in space, using Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2007, p.87) phenomenological body concept view, points out that cyberspace can be understood as the mutual composition of structure and action in terms of body and perception. He developed the concept of perceptual phenomenology and the concept of performance, which I use to supplement the relative lack of discussion of body sensory topics in the concepts of Heidegger and Taoism, and proposed the concept of existence and the complexity of the body in cyberspace.

Painting turns the invisible or the mundane vision into visible existence; it allows us to have a sense of volume and vastness of the world without necessarily having a ‘skin sense’. This kind of vision that can devour all things is superior to the ‘vision given’. It exposes the structure of Being, and in such a structure, the various discrete sensory messages are punctuation and setbacks. The eye dwells in this structure as one dwells in one’s own home. (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.87)

In the concept of Merleau-Ponty (2007, p.87), the body subject is the incarnate subjectivity. Although it limits our views, it is the fundamental starting point for constructing ‘being-in- the-world’. He tried to construct the ‘being-in-the-world’ time and space experience, desire for activity and meaning orientation. Although it is still unavoidable to fall into the dichotomy of ‘consciousness/subject’, he even made a self-criticism of this in his last book *The Visible and The Invisible*. But I think that if Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of *Eye and Mind* (1964) focuses on the painter and poet’s creative experience of pursuing a new language, this can well explain how the painter thinks about the connotation of existence through visualisation. In this context of philosophical thinking, I hope to use this idea to visualise the existence of contemporary people in cyberspace, and to find artistic evidence through the thinking experience of artistic creation between consciousness and objects, between real space and virtual space. In my artworks, I combine the phenomenological experience and the simultaneous existence of Heidegger and Taoism, with the visualisation of the ‘flesh’.

Of my 55 paintings, 41 are sitting [Fig. 7.1], 6 are lying [Fig. 7.2], and 29 sitters are staring at the computer screen [Fig. 7.3]. During about three hours of painting, the sitters barely moved. The screen has changed our physical habits. Our body is



Figure 7.1: YunChu Chang, *Zoe Volpa*, 2019, oil on canvas.



Figure 7.2: YunChu Chang, *Dong Yang Li*, 2018, oil on canvas.

separated from the laws of nature, and also separated from our living space. In the farming age, our bodies moved in line with the cycle of nature. What caused such a change? After the Industrial Revolution, a large number of factories were set up and a large number of people switched from agriculture to industry. The first problem encountered was actually people's sense of body, and the second was people's sense of time. In the agricultural era, people grew crops or raised livestock. The body's way of doing things is constantly moving, watching with eyes, touching with hands, thinking in the brain; all body senses were used. The body is a whole linked system. At the same time, in the agricultural era, the division of labour was rough and disproportionate.

Compared with the agricultural era, in the industrial revolution the body did not move around when working. In the factory, the body needed to move repeatedly in



Figure 7.3: YunChu Chang, *Georgia Efstathiou*, 2020, oil on canvas.

coordination with the production line, and time needed to be more precise. Therefore, we began to train a new generation of people to adapt to this sense of body in school from a young age. We train our bodies to sit for a long time, to be able to grasp the precise time for class and dismissal, and to be able to accept that there are pros and cons for any activity. Our bodies are tamed by desks and chairs, our sense of time is tamed by clocks, and our hearts are tamed by numbers.

The appearance of the modern city has taken a shape based on the fact that we have been trained to be what a factory worker should be, and to adapt to the basic shape for sitting in an office every day. As you can see from the sitters in my two works *Jack Roby* [Fig. 7.4] and *Yuan Tian* [Fig. 7.5], the characters in the pictures have no eyes. It is more accurate to say that they are not really looking at anything. Their eyes are



Figure 7.4: YunChu Chang, *Jack Roby*, 2018, oil on canvas.

fixed on the screen of the electronic product, but they are not looking. This is not like the state of our eyes when observing something seriously. They are immersed in the screen when they use electronic products. No matter whether they are lying or sitting in the physical world, their entire body is actually walking in the virtual space. It is similar to when people in ancient times walked into nature without a mobile phone. Their whole ‘existence’ was anchored in the natural world. Now this natural world has been replaced by a virtual world. We are conditioned to move our bodies to a minimum, sitting for ten hours a day, staring at the screen and doing work. Apart from sleeping for a few hours, we spent the rest of the time lying down and swiping our phones to



Figure 7.5: YunChu Chang, *Yuan Tian* (detail), 2018, oil on canvas.

relieve stress. I have seriously thought about what the humans of the future may be like. I think it might be a jelly with a screen.

I think a lot of people live like this now, for example, the ‘cocoon’ in Japan, which has become a major issue in recent years. The Japanese word for ‘cocoon’ is ‘*hikikomori*’, which consists of two parts, *hiki* – meaning ‘retreat, withdraw’ and *komoru* – meaning ‘concealment, social withdrawal’. It refers to people living in self-isolation, in a small space, not going to school, not going to work, and hardly going out. They cut off the connection between themselves and society as much as possible, hide in their own small world, and live a life without practical significance. When the symptoms of cocooning are severe, some people are reluctant to even walk out of the house, or be seen by their family members. Heidegger’s theory of existence did not anticipate the existence of human beings and the world irrespective of each other, and now they have become

truly irrespective of each other, because the virtual space is the individual, and the individual is the virtual space. Nature no longer exists in such a relationship. The Taoist 'Heaven, Earth and Human' no longer exists. We are only left with people who do not exist in physical space, and 'people' who may exist in virtual space. We exist in cyberspace in a state of 'image'. Henri Bergson claims in *Matter and Memory* (1896) that "our so-called image is a certain kind of existence, which is more than the representation in idealism, and less than the physical reality. This kind of existence lies between the thing and its representation." I think that the brain and body that have been exposed to such images for a long time will show what Bergson (1896) calls 'chaos under the abstract' (*Confusion d'abstractions*) (Bergson 1896, cited in Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.22). The most direct example is that the Norwegian law requires all advertisements with retouched pictures to be marked with slogans. This means that the images on the screen have greatly affected our aesthetic standards for self-images. This era of flooding society with a large number of images has also greatly affected the 'body', such as the sense of positioning of the body in space. This is different from mental activity at the psychological level, where the movement of the body passes through space. If we lose space, if we don't move, our body loses its sense of positioning in space. When our body loses its sense of positioning, our mind also feels homeless. I will discuss this in depth in the next chapter. Merleau-Ponty (2007) believes that there is no vision without thought. However, thinking for the sake of seeing is not enough: vision is a conditioned thought, which is born from the gathering of 'accidental chance' in the body, and it is 'induced' by the body to think. Vision does not choose to exist or not, nor does it choose to think about this thing or that thing. The situation is like this: all the words and thoughts about vision make vision a kind of thought. He said that

according to what we see and facilitate, the precession state of beings is formed, and then according to the being, the precession state of what we see and what is facilitated is formed. This is the vision itself. At the beginning, the body is in a state of nothingness. Through many external things, we slowly come to regard the body as the centre, and other images change around our body. Our body has become the gathering centre of various images. This kind of convergence and reflection creates our self-personality, and the society is formed through this collective reflection.

Because of cyberspace, flat and virtual images have replaced physical spaces and images. Our physical experience of thinking visually has also changed. This change in the relationship with space not only changes our physical state, but our mind and sense of time are also trained to be specific. This is a result of technology and also a politicised discipline. We change our sense of body because of changes in our visual experience. We have changed from living in a vast land and a wide field of vision to being accustomed to staying in a small space for a long time and looking at the screen. We are accustomed to this and feel that this state is more and more comfortable. We lack interaction with real humans, and we have even become afraid of interacting with real humans. Our professional skills are also limited in scope. Everyone's ability to be replaced is very high; so everyone becomes a 'useful person' or tries to become a 'useful person'. We have become a cog in the state machine.

In this state, I think what the artist can do is to turn these Beings into visible existence through actual contact. I try to personally enter the physical space in this lack of human existence, talk to people face to face, and turn the object in front of me into a part of me. Through this visual power in the physical space, these individual worlds reveal a



Figure 7.6: Paul Cézanne, Mont Sainte-Victoire, 1892-95, oil on canvas, 73×91.9cm, Musée d'Orsay, France.

common world. This is like Cézanne's mountain [Fig. 7.6], standing upright among the surrounding mountains, making it itself visible to the painter, and what the painter is asking about, through his gaze, is this mountain. In my research, in the representational space like painting, the existence of my sitters transcends the flat existence of screen images. This may be close to metaphysics, but this metaphysics is not a perfect concept summed up by experience; there is no perfect circle. In these randomly gathered, unique individuals, I interpret diversity through trying to understand their experience of reality. My sitters are my mountains. Chapter 10 offers a more detailed explanation of this concept.

Heidegger claimed that the constantly changing existence is mapped through the intertwined field of the fourfold, and this is also the existence of the intertwined reality of yin and yang as described by Taoism. Gianni Vattimo (1988, p.3) believes that the wisdom of Heidegger and Nietzsche lies in the appropriate style of questioning, applying Dasein to the information society of late modernity. Instead of asking 'What is being?', I turn to 'How to be?' This 'How' refers to the special historical context and specific situation in which 'Dasein' questions 'Being'. We should consider Dasein as 'an event'. When Dasein and 'Being' understand the special historical context and the specific situation of the encounter, then meaning occurs. Here, everything exists at the same time. This concept of spatial existence is the Being that Cézanne is looking for. It is no longer simply a question of colours, shapes, and lines, but has become a question of 'where'. The existence of each individual exists outside the colour of the oil painting, outside the reproduction space, but also inside it. But in fact, neither is it only a question of 'where', because the paintings enter the space, then surpass the space, and the space radiates out between the many colour blocks that cannot be positioned in any space on the canvas, but envelop everything. This notion of spatial existence is what Cézanne was looking for: he tried to represent his vision of his subject in his work. That is, for Cézanne, no vision is innate, but can be painted directly, without complications. More importantly, Cézanne believed that he did not have to choose between feeling and thinking, or chaos and order. It can be seen from his landscape paintings that even though the house in the painting has been reduced to squares, we as viewers can still recognise what the squares refer to.

Or perhaps, viewed from the perspective of philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, the reason why vision theorists such as Cézanne could construct a new metaphysics is that

they did not completely separate sense from reason – Cézanne’s paintings are nothing more than mixing sensations and cognitions in new ways, and then interpreting the world in new perspectives and systems. In such paintings, the world of objects in cyberspace is included. The painter’s vision is no longer to stare at a certain landscape, and the relationship with the world is no longer only optical and physical. The world is no longer presented to me through appearances; it condenses and expresses itself through the visible, and then is realised through my painting. In the end, artworks are not things that verify existence, but condense all things that exist in that moment. By penetrating the appearance of things, the painter shows how things become things and why the world becomes the world.

In my research, it is seen that the room constructs the individualisation process of its owner, and the owner also constructs the room. While my artworks look like they are just portraits, my aim is not to simply paint a physical likeness of a person. I listen to my sitters’ stories, listen intensively to them without judging them. They are living and moving in their rooms, and I draw fragments of their lives in this space. I try to have this life present; I try to make myself present; I try to make that particular time and space present for a moment.

Another important element in my work, which is also an important contemporary element, is cyberspace, which can be seen in almost every piece of my work. Contemporary people are connected to cyberspace all the time. Therefore, cyberspace also occupies an important role in the above-mentioned mapping relationship between the parties. As Heidegger (1966 pp.53-54) asserts:

We depend on technical devices; they even challenge us to ever greater

advances, but suddenly and unaware we find ourselves so firmly shackled to these technical devices that we fall into bondage to them. Still we can act otherwise. We can use technical devices, and yet with proper use also keep ourselves so free of them, that we may let go of them any time. We can use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core. We can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature.

Today, I don't think we can avoid technology; these technical devices have become our 'world'. Just as Heidegger said, we exist with the world, we are the world, these technical devices are also part of the world, and we cannot exist alone. Heidegger continues:

But will not saying both yes and no this way to technical devices make our relation to technology ambivalent and insecure? On the contrary! Our relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed. We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher (Ibid, p.54).

Through my in-person creative process, I incorporate invisible things into my works through personal experience. In the process of creation, because of the different environments, I unconsciously use the body that interacts with the surroundings to construct these happenings. I think this is a very important aspect of my creative process. In the following chapter, I will explain in further detail the impact of the

messages provided by the varying environments and sitter bodies upon each creation, and how these impacts inspire creation itself.

Chapter 8

What is shown in the room and the interview process

In this chapter I will explain the influence of working in different private spaces on my artwork. I will focus on the observation and application of the space theories of Taoism and Heidegger, explained in the previous chapters, in my creation through my artworks. At the same time, I will also discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my working process and artworks.

Using the Taoist perspective to interpret the rooms that I visited during the research process, my sitters did not seek the perfect Feng Shui location with rivers in front and mountains behind. When choosing rental homes, they considered price and distance to facilities (schools, shops, nightclubs). Because it was a relatively short-term residence, the ‘things’ in the room were more streamlined and important. As Heidegger says,

habitual human activities reveal the meaning of things, and through their dwellings, people have a place to place themselves. Human beings establish their relationship with the environment through their belongings and the location of the placed objects. The Qi in Feng Shui tries to find stability and balance in life in the placement of objects.

In the rental rooms of contemporary young students, instability has become the norm: increased inequality, powerlessness, contradictions and loss of the future. We can feel this in the rooms through my works. At the same time, I try to capture the trajectory of social changes and see the future development of society through these young students. Under globalisation, many scholars realise that when questioning the dynamic mechanism behind the phenomenon, the image of flow and uncertainty may be more important than order, stability and system. Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) explain the relationship between housing and the body. Housing is an extension of people: like an extra skin, or second layer of clothing; housing not only shelters and protects, but also exposes and displays. In housing, the body and mind continue to interact: the physical structure of the housing, furniture decoration, social customs and spiritual imagery, all serve to promote, shape, support and limit the activities and concepts that are carried out within its scope. Before the home became the object of thinking, it was already an established environment, shaped by previous generations and long-lived, and housing was the primary player of socialisation. Objects in the world are not simply 'at hand' (*Vorhanden*); they are, most fundamentally, 'ready-to-hand' (*Zuhanden*). We are symbiotic with the environment, and this symbiosis is more primordial than Cartesian mind/matter, subject/object, substance/attribute dualism. Our lives shuttle in an orderly space, the body 'reads' the house, and the house carries the memory of the person with the body. Through habits and residence, each person

establishes a practical grasp of the basic structure of their culture. In my research, my sitters, like their rental houses, are in a state of drastic change and instability. In such instability, the subject of each person is constructed. What I want to describe through my art is a subject in such chaos. Using a limited time, I aim to capture as much as possible of the unique nature and individual personality of each sitter.

In modern society, people are regarded as ‘human resources’. The Taoist concept of Feng Shui is just like the works of art in my research, providing us with many interpretations of how modern people show their living space. “If humans build houses and use their own images to make houses, they will also use houses and house images to construct themselves and become individuals and groups” (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995, p.3). This can be the concept of Feng Shui, which can be said to be superstitious or poetic: “Poetically man dwells on the earth.” As Heidegger said (1971), the poet arrives at the truth zone that is in line with the pursuit of art and thought, that is, the gap between the world and the original struggle of the earth. This zone is also an intermediate zone that opens things up. Heidegger (1971) believes that when we find a way to settle things, this not only opens things up, but also hides things. He uses the poetry of Hölderlin (cited in Heidegger, 1971) to explore whether we can live in the world and above the earth at the same time. In modern times, this method of settlement is a private space that we can arrange by ourselves. So in doing my research, I entered this space to capture the ‘in-between’ and to find the truth, to search for the ‘people’ in this space, and to find the meaning of human existence. Through this kind of presence, participants in religious activities feel the value of culture and history in this domain. Such experience is not just a description of experience and meaning, but a kind of perception of human existence in the world. Heidegger said that the important



Figure 8.1: YunChu Chang, *Anon*, 2018, oil on canvas.

feature of a work of art is to ‘set up a world’. The world is revealed here, and the world cannot be clearly expressed in the form of an object or a concept. Such a world is the secret source of being, ‘being-in-the-world’ (*in-der-welt-sein*) and the sense of belonging ‘at home’. This constant ‘being-in-the-world’ background process Heidegger called the ‘world worlds’ (*welt weltet*), and such a process also needs ‘the earth’ (*die erde*).

One of my interview questions is ‘what’s the most important thing for you in the

room?’ More than half of the people specified the computer [Fig. 8.1]. Cyberspace is the most important position of modern people outside of ‘things’. The Internet has become an environment and a thing simultaneously. People can arrange their place in the Internet just as they arrange their home with Feng Shui. Cyberspace, as a dangerous wealth, does not directly involve all existing things; it is not a direct cause of the destruction of the status quo, but it is located at the centre of the crack. The Internet is not just another disposable tool; it has become an essential element of modern life, providing unlimited possibilities for people to build their own world and create their own personality within the open space of beings. Heidegger (1950) says that only languages can build a world. Today, I think we can also build a world where there is the Internet, and we only see the world on the Internet. At the same time, cyberspace also provides a constantly changing realm of determination and labour, activity and responsibility, arbitrariness and noise, sinking and chaos; all of these have made history. Cyberspace is wealth in a more primitive sense. Everything on the Internet records the possibility of human beings as a historical existence. In modern times, the position and identity of a person in cyberspace have become evidence of their historical existence. The Internet is now something we take for granted. Just as humans use their possessions to build their personal image, they also use their virtual image to construct a virtual life in cyberspace, which represents their ideal self and shows where they reside in their own virtual world. They construct themselves in the image of cyberspace, and this has become the highest possible aspiration and appropriation that people have. In a work of art, art is actual. Therefore, we must seek the reality of the work. Here, we must think about what ‘realistic’ means. Generally speaking, the word ‘realistic’ is the opposite of ‘nonfactual’. But ‘realistic’ has a positive meaning

here, meaning that something is happening here and now. In my work, it is the time and place of the room I entered. The reality of artworks is a dynamic process. In this process, revealing events happen, that is, truths happen. I consider that art is realistic in the work of art, which means that it is perceptible and present, and it is in the process of occurring. To search for the 'reality' of a work is to look for the dynamics of being, and this dynamic is related to the truth that occurs in the work.

Compared to cyberspace, painting is also an art of space, but it could be described as a static form of representation, as it cannot create moving objects. However, through the lines it creates, a still canvas can suggest changes in place, leaving traces on the retina. This presence on the canvas suggests to us a movement that it does not contain. My paintings try to offer the viewer something close to what real movement offers: a series of instantaneous visual sights. These just-right chaotic images between the brushstrokes try to construct a certain life in a certain space, and these spaces contain cyberspace. The changes in external time and space during my creation can be interpreted by the audience through the traces of brushstrokes on the canvas. These states of grasping space (physical space, cyberspace) are also states of grasping the sense of duration (*durée*). Because time in the real world doesn't stop flowing, neither do the ever-changing gaps between these open spaces. Art enables individuals to participate from within in these momentary ways of being and not being present.



Figure 8.2: YunChu Chang, *Virtual Room - Raise Your Hands*, 2020, oil on canvas, 21×29.7cm.

COVID-19

After the COVID-19 outbreak, I could not go to the sitter's room to paint up-close. The long-term research method, therefore, was no longer feasible, and I don't know if there will be such an opportunity in the future. People are becoming accustomed to changing everything to online simultaneous images and videos to replace all actual contacts. The method of digital image recording, storage, transmission, and display greatly expands the form and boundary of digital image art. I also made a series of

Virtual Rooms [Fig. 8.2] in this situation. This was different from the previous process of entering the sitter's room, which required a large canvas to be transported. After the face-to-face interview, it took about four or five hours to complete the painting, excluding the making of the canvas. In terms of 'physical time', the pre-work time was shorter because there was no need to move, and the online interviews became longer (about two or three hours), but the content of the discussion was not deeper, and a lot of small talk was added to the questionnaire. Because the reference material for this *Virtual Room* series was screenshots, I made a screen-size picture, which only took about half an hour to draw, in contrast to the life-size portraits of the previous *100 Rooms*.

When drawing *100 Rooms* I experienced the pressure of time, the pressure of each different environment, and the different physical state of each place. My works often appear stiff due to my lack of proficiency, and I sometimes felt dissatisfied with the performance and configuration of the composition after finishing. There were also times when I did not finish the work. However, no matter what the state is, the finished work is still considered based on the standards of 'painting'. Each work is an accumulation of everything at the time, a unique condensation of that 'moment'. This moment, and my feelings towards my sitter at the time, can be clearly seen in the brushstrokes on the screen, on the fallen leaves, pollen, and gravel on the moving canvas. There are traces of me carrying an over-sized canvas and being blown over by the wind [Fig. 8.3], and traces of not having enough paint halfway through, and needing to buy new paint in order to finish. These screens record the deep communication between me and each sitter. Although I am not always proficient enough to express them to my satisfaction, I will continue to try.



Figure 8.3: Carrying my canvas around the Lancaster University campus.

In the *Virtual Room*, I took many screenshots during the interview. Because of the short-term action, the sitter was able to present many interesting angles, but at the same time, the screen has many limitations due to the condition of the lens. After I collected many interviews with different people, I chose interesting pictures to ‘make’ many oil paintings at once. I use the word ‘make’ because the process of painting becomes a process of colouring when looking at the still screenshot photos on the screen. Jean Baudrillard (1998, p.21) considers that photography can be regarded as a special technique of cutting a block from the appearance of the world and framing it in a unique way. To cut is not just to keep, but to make everything else that is left out of

the cut disappear. These two actions are taking place at the same time (Baudrillard, 1998, cited in Lin, 2014, p.91). I mechanically filled in the oil painting production process like a digital oil painting. This kind of process is actually calm and rather boring. The physical time is fast, but the psychological time is very slow, like a kind of bean-picking exercise or the mundane routine of a factory worker on a production line. Such works can be said to be more ‘precise’ and more ‘like’, similar to images presented by a camera or a screen. Interestingly, Baudrillard (1996) believes that high-resolution images produce low-level thinking. When Baudrillard discusses photography, he does not approach it in the context of aesthetics or art history. Photography is regarded by him as having a magical dimension, which is more of an anthropological dimension. He points out that the status of photography is similar to that of simulacrum painting: “Simulacrum painting, like photography, retains a certain magical status of the image, and thus is the fundamental illusion of the world. The brutal, irreducible form is closer to representation. The origin and acute anxiety of the world – connected with the representation and self-evidence of the world, but with a deceptive self-evidence – and thus in opposition to all realistic visual images, rather than judgement and taste to obtain its value, but a pure fascination.” (Baudrillard, 1998, p.21, cited in Lin, 2014, p.84)

This reminds me of the way that some artists use a projector to project a photo on the canvas and then add many layers of paint. This method may take a long time physically, but the cultural value is not proportional to the time spent. However, this kind of work can achieve good results in the commercial market. This situation surprises me: many art collectors remain fascinated with works which are from the era of the invention of the camera. According to Baudrillard, the characteristic of immersive painting is not

that it has a high degree of similarity with what is depicted or imitated, and thus can be deceiving (mistaken for real), but that it lacks a dimension. The lack of this dimension is, first of all, the effect of light. Baudrillard compares still life, saying: “If still life play with classical volumes and shadows, the shadows on a photorealistic painting don’t have the depth of a real light source” (Baudrillard, 1989, [Galilée, 1979], p.88, cited in Lin, 2014, p.85).

In Baudrillard’s discussion of photography, the lack of this dimension is first presented in the form of a phenomenological observation: things as images are no longer phenomena; as phenomena, things are open to perception, with infinite and multi-faceted perceptual detail. With images, these possibilities are denied. Baudrillard observed that “To make a thing an image is to remove its dimensions one by one: weight, bump, smell, depth, time, continuity, and, of course, meaning” (Baudrillard, 1998, p.3, cited in Lin, 2014, p.87). This fascination, in Baudrillard’s words, is the opposite of beauty and taste. It represents another attraction different from happiness. The intuitive nature of photography, along with its stillness and lack of a time dimension, means that there is always a trace of the past moment and the past photographic event, which helps us to understand the past lives in the photograph. Photography is the intersection of two rays, the light of the past captured by photographic events, and the light of the present that enables us to see these images. This intersection enables photography and deceptive painting to have a deep sensibility in common. However, stripping away the facets of a thing, its weight, depth, time, and colour in making it a black-and-white image, is not the same as stripping away the meaning of a thing.

In my *Virtual Rooms* work, these photos are taken from the excess of real appearance



Figure 8.4: YunChu Chang, *Study of Life Drawing* (1 min), charcoal on paper, 29.7×42cm.

itself. That is to say, the point is not what kind of representation it is, but the excess (*excès*) as representation, a kind of abstract, flat feeling that is a certain common dimension of all the *Virtual Rooms*. Although this is something innocuous and unimportant, it can inspire a kind of ‘doubt’ about reality. In other words, when presented with a world of pure appearance and no depth, although it is so similar to our reality, it can be used as a reverse irony to point out that our world may actually be an illusion. It’s ironic parody evokes a disturbing, familiar strangeness (*inquiétante étrangeté*) (Lin, 2014, p.89).

In *100 Rooms*, the physical time was relatively long, but the psychological time was very short. After the sitter completed the interview, they would continue with a normal activity within the room. I tried to capture a pose that fitted these natural activities. I first drew a large outline with charcoal and then used oil painting to directly capture the dynamics of the characters. I think this is very similar to the one-minute two-minute sketches of life-drawing [Fig. 8.4]. Every time I captured the movement of the sitter, it was a sketch, from head to toe, from toe to head, or from the part of the body closest to me, and within the picture space. Every time was like a life drawing slowly superimposed. Sometimes I was attracted to the details and stayed in one place too much, which caused disharmony and abruptness in the picture. I find that my first impression of the sitter's movements is always the most intuitive and 'correct', so it is important for me to be able to immediately capture it. Such a painting process is extremely focused and sometimes I hardly even feel that I exist.

This is like Heidegger's 'ready-to-hand', or the ancient Chinese story of Chuang-Tzu's encounter in *The Dismemberment of an Ox by Butcher Ding* (AD 476), which describes how a butcher perfected his craft to such an extent that the process of butchering an ox was instinctive, almost an art form with a musical rhythm. Yuk Hui (2016 p.36) tells the story:

“A butcher was cutting up an ox for Wen Hui (a Chinese emperor). Wherever his hand touched, his shoulder leaned, his foot tread and his knee thrust, there was the sound of ripping and the sound of slicing, which kept time with the rhythm of the dance of Mulberry Grove and were as melodious as the music of Jingshou. ‘Ah! Very good!’ Wen Hui said, ‘How

did you achieve such perfection in your skill?’ The butcher put down his knife and replied, ‘What I love is the Tao, which is more advanced than skills. When I first began to cut up an ox, I saw nothing but the whole ox. Three years later, I saw no more the whole ox. Now I deal with the ox in my mind instead of my eyes. The senses stop functioning, but the mind is activated. Following the ox’s natural veins, my knife slips through openings between its muscles and slides through crevices in the joints. I take advantage of what is already there. The knife has never hesitated at the juncture of blood vessels, not to mention the big bones. A good butcher changes his knife every year because he uses his knife to cut. An ordinary butcher changes his knife every month because he uses his knife to hack. My knife has been in use for nineteen years and has cut up several thousand oxen, and yet its edge is still sharp as if it were newly whetted. There are crevices in the joints, but the blade of the knife has no thickness. There is certainly plenty of room for the blade of a knife without thickness to enter the joints where there are crevices. This is why the blade of the knife that has been in use for nineteen years is still sharp as if it were newly whetted. Nevertheless, when I come to a complicated joint and see that there will be difficulty, I proceed cautiously, fixing my eyes on it, moving slowly and cutting gently until the part is quickly separated and drops like a clod of earth to the ground. Then standing with the knife in my hand, I look all around with triumphant satisfaction. I then clean the knife and put it away.’

In simple terms, this story is about continual attempts to ‘unify Dao and Qi’ (道器合一): through technical activities, the cosmic order and the moral order are unified. In

Yuk Hui's view (2016), 'unity of Qi and Dao' are possible, but it must be demonstrated through the Confucian 'unity of man and nature' (天人合一) (Yuk Hui, 2016, p.36).

Unification of Dao and Qi (道器合一). In modern sense Qi means 'tool', 'utensil', or more generally, 'technical object'. Early Daoists such as Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi believed that 'ten thousand beings' (*wan wu*, 萬物) emerge through Dao; [...] Hence Dao is present in thousands of beings as *de* (德, 'virtue'), and in such forms is not separated from beings; it is immanent. (Yuk Hui, 2016, pp.65-66)

When craftsmen use them freely, they feel that tools do not exist. Similarly, when the painting process goes smoothly, I become a tool for the artistic process; I do not exist, and at the same time I exist. After the work is completed, I will not feel that it was me who did it, because time is fleeting: time disappears and suddenly the work is done. It's a pity that this kind of experience doesn't happen very often. It would be nice if it went so smoothly every time. My most impressive experience of this phenomenon occurred when I once drew a river in a sunny outdoor setting. The water of the river was different every second in physical time, but in my eyes it was still, and its composition was just some fragments of colour. It took me about an hour to complete this work, but time seemed to disappear, and the work was suddenly completed. 'Tools' here are not just the instruments used for painting; the painter is also an instrument in this process. I became the carrier of spirit and thought, I became one with the environment, 'unity of man and nature' (天人合一).

In this process, in addition to my constant movement, my sitters are also constantly moving. I need them to be vital and active. When I use my 'Qi' and 'Yun' in my

work, my sitter also needs to have the equivalent of ‘Qi’ and ‘Yun’ to echo me. When I paint landscapes in the natural environment, the breeze and grass echo me like this. In Eastern concepts, ‘Qi’ can be interpreted as a kind of energy; ‘Yun’ can be interpreted as a kind of rhythm (Duan et al., 2009, p.151). In oriental works, this ‘Qi’ is a kind of beauty; it is also the ‘Yang’ of works of art, and is something more visible. Yin, on the other hand, can be interpreted as something hidden. These two elements together present the vitality of the work. Jing Hao’s *A Note on the Art of Brush* (Munakata and Munakata, 1974), describes ‘Qi’ as the painter’s mind and stroke order, a decisive image capture; and ‘Yun’ as the painter’s attempt to hide the background traces, and present an unspoken expression, or a feeling, creating an effect that is subtle and sophisticated. This is a technique that is difficult to teach; it is a natural way of creating works of art that requires the best coordination between the artist and the sitter. This coordination must not be the sitter sitting stiff and motionless for long periods of time. Rather, it is the vitality that each of us shows through the constant changes in time. I focus on the creative process like this. I don’t depict form, but a kind of energy that flows between two sides, and this energy is constantly changing every moment. This can’t be done with a projector; it requires coordinating the movement of the entire body. The best manifestation of this behaviour is to be able to reconcile the contradiction between image and ‘consciousness’, ‘being’ and ‘nothing’.

Heidegger transformed the meaning of time for the subject, with time becoming a group experience, rather than an individual experience. He pointed out that Dasein’s original experience of three-dimensional temporality is not a linear continuous structure of ‘past, present, and future’ at all. He uses the attitude of being related to the events of his own life to explain time (Heidegger, 2019). From the point of view of

survival activities, Dasein is always planning its own survival direction, and carries out anticipatory resoluteness (*vorlaufende entschlossenheit*) for the possibility of his own existence toward death. However, through planning and decision, Dasein's intention is not to bring itself to survival in an unspecified future moment, but to let the possibility of its own true 'being' (a true survival event that is conceived but not actualised) come into itself first (*vorweg*) (*sich-auf-sich-zukommenlass*). In this sense, Dasein always comprehends the 'coming' (*zukunft*) of 'being' (*zu sein*) through its own constant movement. Heidegger tries to transform the 'sense of time' into a form that can be communicated and shared among people. He believes that the objective time we use daily is derived from the collective subjective sense. Therefore, 'time' is the sense of order presented by individual humans to life, and its source is not the social construction formed by the crowd, but the human individual's own experience, current situation or expectation or a structure of experience.

Under this time structure, the sense of order presented by individual humans in daily life can be clearly heard in my interviews. My sitters use the time given by 'The they' to define their lives. For example, *Badziili Muzila Nthubu* said that he had his own room for the first time after he went to college. *Sejal Changede* said that 'before the marriage', she lived in the same room with her family and 'after the marriage' she shared the same room with her husband. She never had her own room. In Heidegger's speech on the *Concept of Time (Der Begriff der Zeit, 1924)* (Heidegger, 1992), he emphasised that "time is not anything" and that any measurement of time is not time itself. 'Real time' is not an objective thing, but a sense of order constructed by the individual's understanding of his own possibilities. Time is not a concrete thing; time is Dasein, and Dasein is time itself. This is a view of explaining time in terms of Dasein and its

possibilities and understanding, and defining time in terms of its own life sequence and existence possibilities. Heidegger defines the ‘sequential relationship’ as how individuals connect with each other to define their relationship. This concept of time is called ‘the ecstatic time’ (*die ekstatische zeitlichkeit*) (Heidegger, 2019, pp.351, 396).

Because people have a deep understanding of the future and a deep understanding of the past, this affects the present as it is no longer attached to something, which makes everything current. Originally, the wholeness of ‘being’ was concerned with preceding oneself in the existence and as a dwelling in the world. Today, when it comes to temporality, the focus is on the present and present future. Progress is based on the future, the present is based on the past, and ‘dwelling’ is possible due to the current moment. In short, when people experience the possibility of their own being through the death of being, the meaning gained from the future reinterprets the past, and stops us from being guided by the meaning in our current actions. Fettered by things, this ‘being’ can exist more authentically in moments of vision (moment/*augenblick*). What is presented in my *100 Rooms* are these moments of vision (moment/*augenblick*). Unlike Monet’s capture of air and light, I try to capture people. After the ‘person’ in front of me reviewed their life and voiced their worries, I tried to give form to their history on the canvas. It is not a Platonistic history, but a history that presents a subjective individual life that is irrational, objective, and universal. Life should be like this.

Technological change and the expansion of media are of course a historical inevitability, but are also of cultural significance. The field of technological aesthetics considers that technology and materials created by humans have their own irreplaceable beauty. However, the comprehensive use of various technologies and materials to express the

spiritual world and spiritual pursuits of mankind, and to enhance the spiritual life of mankind at the level of communication, is still the core aspiration of all art. I think that the use of images and the improvement of new media art in technology and production do not have natural cultural value. It is precisely the convenience and fragmentation of the production of art images that make the humanistic and spiritual quality of these images change. This has become more serious in recent years when many contemporary art exhibitions have used new media art as the main medium, and the audience's feelings are considered above everything else. Many exhibitions now use the sound, light and electricity of new media art to create the physiological impact that attracts the audience's attention. In this regard, we can reflect on the concept of 'culture in art', and by strengthening the potential humanistic dimension of 'culture in art', we can improve the readability and continuity of video art, so that it is not only satisfied with audiovisual and sensory games and performances, but can also become a platform for cultural dialogue. From the perspective of time, contemporary art is the most recent art and the most contemporary art, but how can this type of art have a historical dimension, that is, obtain historical depth? I think there are two types of history that can be associated with contemporary art. The first is the historical content, that is, historical events and current facts are displayed in the works. The second is the historical information carried by media materials and expression techniques. For example, the use of oil painting materials in painting, and the processing technology of oil painting materials must involve the classical historical and cultural information accumulated by the materials. If painting the same subject using oil paint or acrylic paint, the atmosphere of the times and ideals of value conveyed by it will not be the same. For graphic art, it is not that the more advanced the technology, the better

the work. Just like the pursuit of different values in contemporary sculpture, both ‘high-tech’ and ‘low-tech’ sculptors can infuse their humanistic ideals into their work and create a unique artistic language and formal expression. In the end, although the image in contemporary art is very different from the traditional image, it is still a way for the artist to communicate and dialogue with contemporary society. The understanding of its meaning and the construction of criticism should be based on equal dialogue, which forms a diversified cultural interpretation. Around the image, we should establish a relevant, connected system so that we can enter the work from different perspectives such as personal, economic, psychological, dramatic, daily and historical, and enter the mind of the creator. In this way, the inner world of mankind enters the common spiritual space of mankind.

Part 3

Time

Chapter 9

Bernard Stiegler's concept of time

In this chapter I will analyse Bernard Stiegler's theories of time, which discuss and extend Heidegger's work, and analyse how these theories of time relate to my works of art. According to Heidegger, existence is time, and every minute of existence is constantly changing. We are beings with a time dimension, and only exist in an unbroken stretch of time, so time is the key to our understanding of existence. We generally imagine time as the numbers on the clock, which according to Heidegger (1927), is just a number representing time. Previously, the position of the sun in the sky represented time, an authentic time (*eigentliche zeit*), as opposed to the quantified time that Heidegger (1927) considered to be inauthentic, or fake.

If we compare the past and the present, where agriculture is paired with daylight and climate, life in a factory has a different sense of timekeeping. People learn how to fit their bodies into small spaces. Modern society first takes time and politics out of

this transformation, and then puts it back into our bodies. Each individual has been transformed, integrated into the social organisation, and become a screw of the social machine. We have been domesticated by social machines. People's pursuit of value tends to be digital and precise. We see ourselves the same way, we see ourselves with numbers and measurements. Our imagination of our physical bodies has also become a numerical standard. Only things that can be measured numerically exist. Whether it is our world or ourselves, we are always ready to go into production, always calculating whether it is cost-effective. Art is different.

What is real time? What is time without numbers? Heidegger believes that authentic time affects the qualitativisation of existence, and the two are highly correlated. There is time for waiting and brewing. Heidegger (1971, p.165) suggests this originates from the countryside, where land and plants need time. For example, growing plants is comparable to managing relationships with people or creating art. Humans cannot force such things, and mass production is likely to spoil the results. Sometimes even the creators themselves think that nothing can come of it. I think that many art creators reach a state of despair by obeying the market and copying their work for the mass market. Bernard Stiegler (2000) believes that every moment of the present is mixed with a reflection of the past and a projection of the future, and when everything is projected in the present, we can experience the wrinkle in time. Time has its own tenacious tenacity, and the bottom layer is rough. However, in cyberspace, we can't get a real sense of time.

Stiegler deconstructs Heidegger's notion of time-existence in terms of the 'technologies' we have today or in terms of 'tertiary retention', a term he coined. Bernard

Stiegler was a French philosopher who advocated philosophy from technology. He used the views of the anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan (1911-1986) to study the time and origin of technology from a historical and anthropological perspective. The relationship between technology and art is very close in this concept, and technology and art have long been merged as 'la technique' in the French tradition. When French people talk about art, they are not limited to pure Fine Art, but include practical industrial design, architectural art, home decoration, fashion design, gardening and urban planning skills. Similarly in English, the term 'technique' is similar to 'technology', became popular around the time of the two world wars. Art is inseparable from technology, but it is not entirely technology. This is similar to *The Dismemberment of an Ox by Butcher Ding* (AD 476) introduced in the previous chapter, and is also comparable to the words of Zhuangzi in *Tian Dao (The way of Heaven)* describing how a master makes wheels:

The wheelwright said, 'Your servant will look at the thing from the point of view of his own art. In making a wheel, if I proceed gently, that is pleasant enough, but the workmanship is not strong; if I proceed violently, that is toilsome and the joinings do not fit. If the movements of my hand are neither (too) gentle nor (too) violent, the idea in my mind is realised. But I cannot tell (how to do this) by word of mouth; there is a knack in it. I cannot teach the knack to my son, nor can my son learn it from me. Thus it is that I am in my seventieth year, and am (still) making wheels in my old age. But these ancients, and what it was not possible for them to convey, are dead and gone: so then what you, my Ruler, are reading is but their dregs and sediments!' (English translation: '*The Writings of Chuang Tzu*', James Legge, 1891)

This refers to an empirical technique in a craft, and I think it is also what Heidegger called 'in-between'. Artists have to think and practice for a long time before making paintings. This kind of coordination exercise involving the eyes, hands, body and brain cannot be replaced by technology. In any case, paintings made by artists possess an additional 'in-between', an ambiguous zone and an inaccuracy in the method that is exclusive to human creation. This presents the value of painting.

Stiegler (2000) identified art as the highest form of technology and an important part of contemporary memory technology. In such a concept, man is a maker of tools (*Homo Faber*) and uses those tools to make objects or artworks. People make things to store memory, change the form of time, and change the way of cognition of time, even changing time itself. Memory is an important thread in Stiegler's philosophical examination of technology. In his ideological system, in addition to the traditional meaning of time, memory is a main thread that runs through the relationship between technology and time. In his three-volume *Technology and Time* (2012-2016), each volume includes research on memory, and the expression is diverse. Of his writings, the first volume focuses on history and meaning; the second volume focuses on explaining the meaning of memory in modern society; and the third volume discusses the system of memory in art (film). For Stiegler, Heidegger's philosophy helps to deal with the 'instance' of digital technological manipulation and the 'take; *nehmen*' of digital technological objects. Furthermore, Husserl's philosophy helps to explain Stiegler's concept of 'duration' of digital technology operation, and the 'exteriorisation' of his responsibility and physical sense of remembering things (exsomatisation). Finally, Derrida's philosophy helps Stiegler deal with the postural 'rhythm' of digital technology manipulation and the whole issue of digital life. On the one hand, these different

expressions of memory reflect Stiegler's use of Plato, Aristotle, Husserl, and Bergson's thoughts on memory, and his use of the anthropology of André Leroi-Gourhan, film, and digital technology to explain the fusion of technological development. On the other hand, this reflects that there are still cracks in this fusion.

In Stiegler's theory, the development of an individual is based on three kinds of memory, one is genetic memory, the other is mental memory (formed later in life), and the third is extrinsic memory mixed with technology and language. Of these three memories, the emergence of technology is a counterpart to Epimetheus' fault. Epimetheus assigned various skills to different animals, but forgot to assign them to humans. Prometheus stole technology and fire from the gods and gave them to man, so that man could survive on the ground, but this survival presupposes death. Technology originally belonged to the gods and to the golden age of pure perfection, when gods and men were indistinguishable. The gods' revenge was to use technology to create duality, chaos and alienation in the human world; technology has become capitalised technology with its own life and will, and is finally becoming the master of human beings in this new world, becoming 'God' itself. Humans are the product of the double fault of forgetting and stealing, and memory is a remedy for this fault. Plato's description of memory can be found in *Theaetetus*, when Euclid said: "Of course memory alone will not work. But I took some notes as soon as I got home, and later when I was free" (Plato, 1892). Many supplementary memory carriers have since appeared and are used to assist memory.

Similarly, writing, photography, records, the Internet and other technologies are all memory carriers. At the moment when memory is technologicalised, "memory continues

its own process of liberation on the basis of getting rid of genetic records, but also leaves the imprint of fission, which is left in all forms such as stones, walls, books, machines, jade, etc.” (Stiegler, 2012, p.200). In the process of human affairs, ideas, etc. being processed by technology to form memory carriers, the technical memory carriers provide different possibilities for the continuous presentation of the above-mentioned contents; the goal is to bring about the fission of memory. The process of technology becoming a memory carrier has opened the externalisation of memory. Memory can no longer exist only in our brain but can exist outside the body, and memory is preserved through other media made by technology. This preservation method not only appears as a technical means, but also changes the formation logic of memory itself. Do we put our memories on other things, or do we put words, photos or images on other things as our memories?

In Stiegler's research, memory loss or interruption begins to occur as humans use tools to externalise memory, and memory also becomes a defining dimension of human beings. The most obvious example is a photo review on Facebook over the years. This social media becomes how others see or remember you, and possibly how you remember yourself. “A tool is a truly inanimate and animate memory, an organic inorganic substance essential to the definition of the human organism” (Stiegler, 2000, p.208). Such a concept is closely related to Heidegger's problem of forgetting, because “the forgetting to record memory as being is the destiny of being” (Stiegler, 2000, p.5). Stiegler's concept of extensional memory is a paradoxical being. It is a fault because it is natural for memory to forget over time, but this device enforces not forgetting, and at the same time causes some kind of fission in memory. In addition, it is also a kind of compensation, because it provides the possibility for the reconstruction of memory. Such a process involves the definition of the memory subject, the reconstruction of the

content and the authenticity. Modern technology provides new, and sometimes public, places for memory. At this point, two questions arise: memory of what? And whose memory is it?

These new places of memory are what Stiegler calls a disorientation, the disintegration of context brought about by technological development. 'Memory of what' has expanded the scope of 'what' due to the increasing penetration of technology into human society. In addition, who memory belongs to is an issue in the process of human interaction with technology; the subject of memory has resulted in 'who' becoming more diverse. Moreover, added to the individual memory and collective memory in the traditional sense, data memory as a medium brings the memory of 'who' and 'what' into a new place, and brings out the loss of space and suspension of time (Stiegler, 2000).

In the modern world, many different memory technologies such as information technology and the Internet have brought about both the repetition and absence of memory. These all lead to the loss of time or the suspension of time. This suspension of time results in a blurring of the boundaries between the present and the future. Stiegler sees this as "the emergence of a new type of temporal object – that is, a non-linear, discretisable object that is the result of hypervideo link technology" (Stiegler, 2012). Such a temporal relationship leads to an inquiry into the authenticity of memory. The objectivity of what we call real memory or just memory is questioned; indeed in the contemporary era, this so-called objective photographic record or film record is often deliberately distorted for personal or political purposes. These external memories then take on creative connotations. During my interview, the sitters recalled their first room

as they remembered it. This living space that exists in the memory may be the original memory, or the memory relayed through family members, or through photos and videos telling us something that may have happened.

Husserl said that the first existence is protention, and does not belong to the past, but constitutes the present, as it is passing in the present, and the present is passing. As for the past, it contains the second existence, that is retention, that which was the first but has passed, and thus becomes the second. When different people are faced with the same information and situation, each person will grasp different things. This is also what Heidegger called 'the horizon'. This is because, in the face of a thing, the first protention is the first choice, but the first choice is immediately overtaken by the second retention that is formed and that is unique to each person; the second retention thus becomes the standard of choice. So, to be the standard of existence, what it really means here is that everyone thinks about things in different ways, and interprets things in their own way. The artist also interprets things in their own way, and in producing a work, and if the work is justified, it is necessary and provokes discussion. This may form something among the audience that is communal or shared, and might be called social. This thing is the sculpture of the culture formed through the work. Such a process joins to some extent the accumulation or heritage of collective persistence and pre-existence left to us by tertiary retention; that is, a sharing of those extra-corporealizations and spaces that are inscribed through the various forms that make up our time and common memory.

In 2018, Stiegler held a workshop at the China Academy of Art in Beijing. The lecture, entitled *What Can Art Do in the Twenty-First Century?*, mentioned: "The organisms

and artifacts of power and knowledge attempt to constitute a common will through a third retention, that is, a society. The social atmosphere is formed by the less shared persistence and pre-existence; through this social atmosphere, what we call culture is responsible for the process of externalisation, transforming craftsmanship into art, and transforming contingency and accident into a state of necessity and reality” (2018). The persistence and pre-existence of our hearts, privacy, and uniqueness in the creation of my artworks are based on, and supported by, the collective and shared preservation persistence and pre-existence. My shared psyche with sitters, and our private sharing of these unique moments together, build our relationship. This persistence and pre-existence come from words we speak and hear that have been created before us. All knowledge and works are the collectively preserved and pre-existing crafts, sculptures, cults and cultures. Our art and culture are built on these foundations. This persistence and pre-existence, bequeathed by a more or less anonymous and common ancestral past, are also the life stories of my sitters. These stories also project a shared future that is always elusive, inaccessible, and unlikely; but, through the works, this future is always persistent and open.

In my oil paintings and interviews with my sitters, I try to get them to reminisce about the past. Each subject recalled and described their childhood and hometown memories without the aid of external technology. These memories are stored in our brains, which have been naturally mixed with external memories (photos, videos, family accounts). However, what I want to explore in my work is an unknown. With the help of external technology, we can supplement our senses and memories which can also change the way we understand the world. This is the close relationship shared by art and technology. As Walter Benjamin mentioned in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

(2008): “We should ask whether photography and film are art rather than how they change art.” In my creative process, these technologies have become one with our lives, but what can I do to step closer and explore this in more depth? Heidegger believed that the technology of his time reduced the organism to a machine and life to a calculation, ideas that are still valid today. Heidegger searched for the origin of art, or its existential experience, in order to search for a different beginning for the world he lived in. I think such investigations remain important. The exploratory experience developed by my art is deliberate; it requires a closer and unbiased approach to get to know a person deeply. Starting by knowing someone deeply and with kindness offers the possibility of changing the future. We reorganise the past through such futures, for example: the movement of decolonisation. This is a way of thinking that does not value positive performance and numbers, and rejects the way society as a whole needs to pursue ‘progress’. If we adopt this way of thinking, we can find a path that goes beyond progressivism. It is preparation to articulate a locality (*ortschaft*).

Heidegger calls it orientation (*erörterung*), namely, to identify the place to which one belongs (Yuk, 2021, p.213). Technology is in the world, technology is in life, and technology is in painting. But painting is not a technology; it contains a technology, but the artist does not lose skills because of the widespread use of the camera, nor should they. A painting that imitates a photograph cannot and does not have to surpass it. The artist has freed his hands from the cage of ‘painting alike’, but has a new task: capturing the invisible. Oil painting is such an ongoing activity that uses both temporary and long-term memory. I look at my sitters, I memorise what they look like, and then I paint on the canvas. My cognition understands that I am drawing the sitter’s ear as my pen moves across the canvas. At this point my previous experience

comes to the fore and whispers to me the anatomy of the ear. I look at the sitter again and notice that their ears are a little wider and a little smaller than the ears I know. But if you're watching me move the brush, you just see that I've drawn a number 3. I probably made four brush strokes to produce the outline of the ear in this 3 shape. After thinking about each part of a painting in this way, it becomes an accumulation of common meaning, culture and time. Art is determined by its technology but it is equally possible for art to transform technology, especially by returning technology to an original existential problem. My artwork aims to transcend the geometric rationality inherent in machinery and industrial technology and transform it by bringing it back to life. Heidegger does not think about how art is transformed by technology, but asks how art transforms technology: how do we get technology back to its place in life? Going a step further, can we build a new Gestell by approaching life through art and technology? I think approaching real life, as opposed to virtual life, is an important method. The entire field of contemporary art attempts to decouple from illusion, and the artist tries to use plane dimensions to depict the unknown. It may not be possible to find answers. The histories of individual lives may be included in my artistic process, but inevitable diversity is not explained or interpreted. The unknown we think about is not a concept unified by a bunch of experiences, but a certain structure of events (*structure de l'événement*) that are assembled by chance (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.120). These individual life stories are not a hindrance to interpretive diversity; they are the underlying reason for diversity. These stories make diversity an ongoing theme of history. After such a theme becomes an artwork, it opens up a field of its own, and it becomes itself beyond diversity.

These life stories are the underlying rationale for multiple interpretations, with

diversity becoming an on-going theme, including what Stiegler calls tertiary retention. A work of art is a never-ending period of time transformed into space, and a work of art presents itself to the viewer in the same way. A period like this is the result of social sculpture because it is open to all; after all, we are all sculptors or nurturers in some way. For example, if there is a piece of work that moves you, it will have effects; and these effects will be reflected in reality through externalised expressions, even externalised impressions, and in some way, will affect people. To function, that is, by being inscribed in the space of time, it will form new persistence and pre-existence in people; then it will be spatialised by people, through words or works. However, the sensibility of this work has been abruptly abandoned (*désaffecté*) today because the rise of the cultural industry has deprived the consumer of the ability to individualise the mind. We have developed a collective way of thinking, that is depriving us of the ability to think independently, therefore we are unable to contribute to each other.

The work itself opens up a new field, allowing discarded objects to deform and reproduce themselves. Humans try to establish a kind of philosophical thinking through the dynamic way the work exists and the possibility that the work can reveal. This kind of thinking goes directly to the core of things through the surface of the artwork, and the experience of the artist has become the proof of this through the process of creation. This is not a matter of dimensions on the canvas, but rather that the painter condenses and descends to represent himself through some visible things, and the painter is born between these visible things. A work of art is something that is actually experienced, but it is not something that is actually experienced. A work of art is something that happens by itself. There is no technology in it, and painting will always ultimately boil down to the relationship between people, brushes and the canvas.

Chapter 10

Moments of Vision

In this chapter, I will analyse the moments of vision (Heidegger's *augenblink*) when I create my work. I will attempt to discuss what happens during the period of time when I produce my oil paintings in a phenomenological way. I think the most attractive part of artistic performance is the long gap between events, in which memory and present are intertwined, and the void after the artistic process takes place. I think these uninterrupted and continuous happenings are both life and art. I hope to convey a person's ordinary life. Life has already existed for tens of millions of years. How to live and breathe, a person's condition, the distance between him and death, how sitters position themselves in their room, the temperature, the smell; these daily notions that are repeated at present are also part of history, but they belong to the abandoned part. The not-abandoned part of history has been perfectly described by previous artists. Compared with "increasing" the weight of life and the meaning of life, I prefer to go deep into the awareness of the moment. Life itself is already an endless exploration.

The time when I enter the sitter's room, interview them and record their lives in the room, is something I have discussed throughout this thesis, and it is what I consider to be the most important thing in making art. This chapter includes the time-meaning of life and the harmonious relationship between people of different racial and cultural backgrounds that is behind the work. I think that art needs to describe human nature and the human condition, and face-to-face, in the process of creating such art, we deepen each other's cognitive fields. On the one hand, works of art are rooted in the experience of everyday life, and on the other hand, they elevate the natural and unthinking routine to the realm of intricate comprehension. Because art is rooted in daily life, artworks not only present daily life, but also present various other problems, and I set these problems within my oil paintings to point directly to the positioning and existence of life. The sitters are independent individuals, but are inseparable from the formation of the mainstream ideology of contemporary class based society, as well as from the formation of the human subjectivity of the contemporary social order. These existential issues are all revealed through a purposeless work of art.

If I use the concept of temporality to analyse each of my works in this series, when I draw my sitter, what I draw in the present, in this time and space, is the he/she of the past that I see in this brushstroke. In the meantime, I'm already anticipating my next future brushstroke. However, there is an 'in-between' between this brushstroke and the next, and this in-between contains a kind of uncertainty and inefficiency in the time and space at that moment. This vague gap contains the physical and mental states of me and the sitter. This phenomenon phenomenalisises the reduction of the known and the unknown of this time and space back to a sensory experience, which represents the fusion of mind and world, signs and things, cognition and perception. I think

this corresponds to Cézanne's work *Mont Saint-Victoire* (1904-1906) [Fig. 7.6]. In the process of repeatedly painting the same mountain, Cézanne captured the brushstrokes, and the brushstrokes were filled with this 'in-between'. This is a small space filled with sunlight and air, allowing the viewer to move into the picture. Looking at Cézanne's paintings, I feel as if I could breathe and spin while standing among the many brushstrokes. It is an experience like walking into a mountain for a hike, and the mountain next to me moves beside me. Although I can only see the view from the limited flat perspective of the painting, I am also in the middle of Saint Victoire. This experience of inviting the audience to enter the painting can also be felt in shanshui, where there are blank spaces leaving clouds and mists among the small mountains and rivers. We can walk into the clouds and feel the sky and the atmosphere. At the same time, this experience is what we feel in cyberspace. Take a video game from a first-person perspective: physically, I only see a dark corridor, but because of the perspective, I feel that I am walking, hearing footsteps echoing through my headphones. There are many other details that we actually feel are ambiguous, but we unconsciously add our imagination to complete our physical sense. In my oil painting exhibitions, the viewers look at the brushstrokes in the picture and feel the hesitation or smoothness between this brushstroke and the next brushstroke, slow or rapid, and can even touch rough or delicate surfaces. The important thing is to add the viewer him/herself between this touch and the brush. In addition, viewers can choose to walk into the sitter's room by listening to a recording of them telling the story of their life.

In Cézanne's painting of the *Mont Saint-Victoire*, the mountain is breathing and changing. The trees on the mountain are growing, the clouds are fluttering, the sunlight changes between the clouds and the light and shadow on the mountain, the birds are



Figure 10.1: Working process.



Figure 10.2: Working process.

flying, and the river is flowing. Cézanne's body is also changing. He is breathing, his eyes are now wide open and sometimes squinted, he is a little closer to the canvas or a little farther away, he cranes his neck to look at the mountains or back at the canvas. These ever-changing flows are full of 'in-between,' full of gaps. While I was drawing my sitters, they were active, playing video games, doing homework, reading books, or watching movies, with some paying attention to every stroke I drew. And I was sitting or kneeling on the ground or leaning against the wall, sometimes standing and jumping excitedly, backing away or getting closer to my painting, while my paint brush seemed to attack the canvas [Fig. 10.1 and Fig. 10.2]. This state may sometimes approach what Heidegger describes as 'ecstasy' (German: *ekstase*) in his 1927 book *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 2019), when our existence in the world tends to focus on a certain person, task or past. Telling someone to 'stay in the present' can be paradoxical if the present

only appears ‘outside’ of future possibilities (our predictions; *entwurf*) and past facts (our throws; *geworfenheit*). The ancient Greek is *εκ-στασις*, that is, *ex-stasis*, which means ‘a state of detachment’, ‘a detachment from oneself, to another state’. However, even in a state of detachment, a person can perceive another person’s consciousness; indeed, in a sense, consciousness is usually detached (Stiegler, 2012). At this point, the object of consciousness is not itself. It is the understanding of ‘in the state of the self’, or ‘enstasis’ that gives way to the understanding of ecstasy, when one can express ‘beyond the state of the self’ in the sense of time: from the perspective of time, the past, the present, and the future are all transcending each other. In fact, our existence in the world is usually embodied by someone, something, or past events. This state may also be what Taoism calls ‘Tao enlightenment’. Compared with the state of ecstasy, when I am painting I feel an absolute silence that does not exist in the present, the past, or the future.

In the process of creating my oil paintings, everything is changing, but at the same time I feel that I am still. The way time is perceived may not only be chronological, but may also be shaped by culture and era. Heidegger believes that because people know that they will die one day, they can really think about the meaning of their lives, taking it in equanimity.

When I was interviewing sitters, I was surprised to find that many people said that the most feared thing was the fear of their own death. Initially, this surprised me, because in the Taiwanese Taoist thought, death is a natural occurrence and there is nothing to be afraid of. I think in the West people are afraid of death because of a linear view of time: if time is linear, then the end of that line is the end. The Taoist

view of time is circular. Ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi (369-286 BC) believed that life is like a dream, where he dreamed that he became a butterfly, and woke up and became a person again. Taoism believes that when you come to this world, you are completing a task, and after completing the task you should do in this life, you go to a different life. Every life has its own task to complete. I think it's because of how I think about life, that I'm not afraid of death, that I signed a non-resuscitation order and an organ donation agreement when I was about twelve years old. This may be said to be the poise of a different cultural system. If we accept that death is a part of life, recognise it clearly and face it calmly, we can be free from the fear of death and the trivialities of life. Only under this premise can we be free to be ourselves.

When I create my oil paintings, my process includes Heidegger's question, "Am I my time?" (*bin inch Eminem Zeitgeist*) (Heidegger, 2019, p.125). Dasein is concerned with 'my time' and how I live in my time. Worry-laden Dasein 'precedes' and transcends itself: the ontological meaning outside itself is advanced, and the essential phenomenon of temporality is the future. "Being prior to oneself means being prior to oneself in being that is already in the world" (Ibid): that is, being. 'Already' here means that everything has always begun, but the uncertainty of panic means that nothing has started, because nothing will end – Dasein (existence) will never end, and it is always full of doubts about itself. It has no end in itself, and faces the endless nothingness, and the continuum of nothingness, that is, an end of what is both certain and indisputable, and at the same time impossible. Heidegger claims that '*sorge*' (cura/care) is the definition of man. Dasein's throwability (actuality), indulging (sinking) and existence constitute the complete 'Care' (*sorge*). The concept of Dasein is synonymous with an in-the-world presence. The essence of man is that man can plan and choose himself

according to his own possibility. This is the real Dasein. However, although Dasein exists in everyday life, when with others, the individual disappears into ‘The They’ and loses its independent self and freedom, known as ‘the sinking of Dasein’. People are thrown into the world for no reason, get caught up in the busyness of daily life, and lose themselves in the common existence. ‘Care’ is a holistic concept of human existence, which considers that people always point to a future of self-transcendence; “In other words, existence is always practical. The meaning of existence is essentially determined by practicality” (Ibid). But the possibility of a ‘return’ of loneliness, in its own sense of detachment from world-historicity, is not what we are looking for in the sense of the Epimetheus principle (as previously mentioned), and the discourse on de-rooting remains very vague. People seem to be getting lonelier. On the one hand, there is the possibility of universal communication infinitely amplified by technology; on the other hand, in the virtual space where the real and the false, the virtual and the real are combined, the individual is averaged and homogenised, and becomes an insignificant molecule. If the individual may be significantly enlarged in the technological world, then he/she may also be significantly reduced, reduced even to an insubstantial thing, thus deepening the individual’s sense of loneliness. Although it is inevitable for individuals to be lonely, our loneliness is now formatted and formalised, and constitutes a new kind of profound loneliness.

‘Care’ shapes people and accompanies them all their lives. At the end of the day, people’s souls and their bodies return to the earth. In Greek, the word ‘Care,’ as explained by Epimetheus, corresponds to ‘expectation’, which has the dual meaning of forgetting and knowledge, hope and worry, error and truth. Truth is the disclosure of forgetting: forgetting is primordial, just as Epimetheus’ fault (forgetting to give

anything to humans) marked the original primordial defect; so, as Heidegger (2019) says, “Dasein is always already there every time, between truth and untruth.” This structure of worry reflects the integration of the Prometheus principle and the Epimetheus principle. The experience of Prometheus is the first stage of the Epimetheus principle, and it embodies the drift, the initial weakness, from which something arises. From the experience that produces faults, reflection on the existence of the original flaw is possible, even in the repetition of everyday life.

From the ontological point of view, it is a question of hands: who’s hand, and what is the hand? Understanding the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ expressed by the hand is understanding the truth. Tradition has always understood this truth narrowly, as the truth of the ‘what’ itself that belongs to the thing at hand. But truth is the truth that ‘who’ and ‘what’ are interconnected. ‘Who’ is the expression of death. In fear, Dasein faces a ‘what’. In panic, Dasein faces its ‘who’, and ‘who’ in a sense ‘presents’ before it hesitantly, but ‘who’ does not show which ‘who’ is the right ‘who’. The questioned ‘who’ turns to the ‘what’, in order to escape its questioning. This question is its uncertainty. In the face of this uncertainty, the purpose of the world collapses, and the world acquires the characteristics of ‘completely meaningless’. But this question is also about ‘original existence’. In short, ‘panic’ is the process of opening up to the world (Stiegler, 2012). This is what Heidegger calls the problem of the hand. It’s about what we see, what we don’t see, and how we’re supposed to find our being. We affirm our existence because of our knowledge of death, and panic because of the uncertainty about the future and death. This panic leads to our sense of powerlessness and also brings us the possibility of opening up the world. From the perspective of works of art, the issue of what media and techniques are used is only a narrow perspective from which to understand works

of art. An artist trying to use a work of art to express ‘what’ is more important than the materials being used. But truth lies between the medium of the work of art and the technique and what it expresses. All works of art are an expression of life, and all life eventually dies. In fear, the work of art confronts a ‘what’. In panic, the work of art confronts its existential problem, and that problem is its uncertainty. In the face of this uncertainty, the purpose of the world collapses, while the work of art acquires the quality of being completely meaningless. This is also a question about primordial existence.

Stiegler (2012) believes that the problem of Being is developed further through technology, so the existence problem is also a technological problem. The technology here can be technology or art. He pointed out that Heidegger’s Dasein ignores the role of external memory construction on Dasein in the contemporary world, most likely due to the fact that this technology wasn’t developed in Heidegger’s time. I think human ‘Care’, worry and loneliness are the same, no matter the era. Humans exist in the world through the ‘Care’ of things and others, so they are dwelling in the existence of beings encountered in the world. It’s just that in ‘Care’, people are often lost to the world in the form of ordinary people who are addicted and immersed. Heidegger called this phenomenon of inauthentic self-existence ‘falling’ (Heidegger, 2019, pp.219-220). Among other things, it can be seen that the existence of a situation means “existence that precedes itself—that is already in a world—as a being that dwells in the world.” This means that the existence of a whole person includes the world in which the person lives. The foundation of this existence is ‘Care’ (Heidegger, 2019, pp.237, 375). Heidegger also said: “The perfection of man—man in free existence as his own possibility (planning) becomes what he can be—is ‘completed’ by ‘care’” (Heidegger, 2019, p.243).

So far, it has been revealed that looking at the reason why people are people with ‘Care’ rather than ‘rational subjects’ is Heidegger’s greatest subversion of traditional humanism. Panic creates loneliness and thus opens up other issues. Loneliness is not being withdrawn, but being in the world, and being in the world means not being in oneself. The presence of the world in the sinking becomes outside itself, and this is the Epimethean situation. In Heidegger’s thought, temporality is mainly defined as ‘a future which makes present in the process of having been’. With the difference of living activities, the pattern of temporality revealing itself also varies (Heidegger, 2019, pp.375, 374, 377). Instead of seeing the past, present and future as a straight line, we should try to use memory as a resource that allows us to think about the future. This is crucial. Humans are capable of time travel in thought, looking forward or backward. This enables us to do so many different things, such as planning the future or creating a work of art. The importance of memory has long been known; for example, in the eyes of Aristotle, memory is not an archive of life, but a tool for imagining the future. It’s hard to recall the past with certainty, which used to appear to be a disadvantage but is, in some ways, an advantage. This natural memory loss can offer more space to think and experience. However, when memory is impaired, so is our ability to think about the future. People with amnesia cannot predict the future because humans rely on memory to think about the future. We think that imagining the future is quite different from imagining the past. However, these two processes are interrelated. We use similar parts of our brains to recall the past and picture our future lives. It is with memory that we can imagine the future and preview future events in our minds. This skill allows us to plan ahead and trial different permutations. If human existence is ‘Care’, all aspects of ‘Care’ will be unified and become meaningful through time. To

put it bluntly, the meaning of human existence is tied to temporality.

As I create each oil painting, I work with the sitter to create memories of how we made this work. This pure artistic experience of human beings with people of different genders, races, ages and social classes will help in the future. Because we use past experiences to construct the future, if we have a harmonious present now where we make art together, then in the future when we meet people who are different from us, our horizons, expanded by previous experiences, will also open up our tolerance and acceptance. When we use our ‘native language’ and ‘reason’ we should notice this is not the only ‘language’ and ‘reason’. This is just one of many traditions. In this multicultural world, when I set out my religious, aesthetic, political, and ethnic value systems, I should be aware that these systematic-historical values present both opportunity and limitation. Traditionally, a linear view of history requires the existence of a ‘central perspective’, and around this central perspective, many events are gathered and sequenced. With the collapse of the idea of linear history, thinkers have come to realise that there is no single history, only genealogical traces of the past, projected from different viewpoints. The habit of thinking of the existence of a supreme, all-encompassing central point of view to unify all distinct others is now seen as a mere illusion. With this questioning of the linear view of history comes the crisis of the idea of progress: if human events do not form a linear course, then we cannot see them as heading towards an end, as the realisation of a rational plan of reform, education and liberation. This is because the concept that sees history as the progressive realisation of human nature must see history as unilinear. Only if there is a macro-narrative of history can one speak of ‘progress’; moreover, in contemporary times, the end or purpose of a particular process or direction always originates from a certain conception of man.

Enlightenment thinkers, Hegel, Marx, positivists, historians of various types, more or less all believe that the meaning of history is the realisation of civilisation, and the concept of progress requires some kind of ideal of human beings. As a criterion, and in actual operation, human ideals are based on the model of Western Europeans.

It is as if to say that Europeans are the best form of human nature, and the trajectory of history is towards the gradual realisation of this idea. The changing conditions of political reality do not depend solely on a change in historical outlook—that is, a conceptual critique of nineteenth-century historicism (idealistic, positivistic, Marxist, etc.). What has happened in history as we know it is something different and broader: the Europeans colonised societies they believed to be more ‘primitive’ in the name of the ‘superior’ of good and right, of a more mature civilisation. The ethnic group has resisted, making the linear, centralised view of the de facto history of the Enlightenment questionable. After all, who should be enlightened? And who is qualified to enlighten others? The answers to these questions are no longer taken for granted, or rather, this way of asking questions is based on a biased mindset in the first place. The European idea of human nature has been revealed as one of many, not the only one. The European conception of human nature, while not necessarily wrong, cannot attain its status as the true essence of ‘all people’ without accompanying violence. Classification of different peoples may initially appear to aid understanding; labels may not in themselves be wrong, but they are not helpful for fully understanding what lies beyond the surface.

Dilthey (1905) believed that an encounter with a work of art (and at the same time an encounter with historical experience) is to experience the imaginary forms of existence and to invest in a way of life that is different from ourselves, that is, different from

the concrete everyday life in which we ourselves are deeply immersed. However, art is different. Art retreats from usefulness. What, we ask, is the meaning and value of art? This value does not depend on usefulness or uselessness. It's all about a technological world where everything works for the individual. In modern times, when thinking about the phenomenon of art, the art that detaches itself from usefulness returns to the phenomenon of life that we were born to in the beginning. Because art is useless, when we think about art, we can stop thinking about price, value or some scientific quantifier. If you think about these numbers, you are not thinking about art. Art just asks you to let go of some existing frame and feel it. I hope the next time you see a piece of art, you try not to read the commentary and try to feel it first. How does this work of art make me feel? I feel confused, I feel ugly! What on earth is it doing? It's all about your feelings, and whatever you are feeling, positive or negative, is good. Then think about why the artist does this. This may be a way of thinking about things from an angle that ordinary people have not thought of. This way of thinking is also very suitable for understanding people. Can we try to think about a person without relying on their colour, status, clothing and value when we are with them? This is also the original intention of my series of works: to sit down and quietly listen to the sitter's life story, then record it in an oil painting. All are equal when we think about the meaning of death.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

I come face-to-face with sitters to paint their portraits in their private spaces; a powerful form of communication that transcends words. Stereotypes and racism naturally disappear when we really get to know someone. I start with the way the sitters move, the composition, the expressions, the gestures, the specific direction of the light. Their room furnishings, life stories, and images on the Internet are the source of my work. Each painting is a unique combination of a specific time and space painted on the surface of the canvas. Memories of different individuals from around the world are important to me, ensuring the continued potential of these works to create meaning. These interracial experiences of life span many individuals, so the figures in the paintings have a timeless quality.

When I consider in my thesis how the body, space and time are involved in the process of my artistic creation, I am in fact asking how contemporary art and philosophy can

establish contemporary people's being. I try to discern the empirical cornerstones of contemporary society that differ from the pre-modern world. First of all, I focus on the relationship between the human body and the truth of art. The relationship between the body and art is divided into the sitter's body and the artist's body. In the process of creating my work, the sitter's body exists simultaneously in the private room, in cyberspace and on my canvas with the subject's body positioned and observed at different angles at the same time. People's awareness of their bodies cannot and need not be like ultra-high definition television; their knowledge of themselves is a complete and shaped whole. But there are times when viewed from different angles, whether tangible or intangible, people realise that they are not as complete and shaped as they think they are. This thorn-like feeling isn't about beauty or ugliness, it's about whether we can control how we look. As an artist, the solution in my work is to depict the sitter in motion, as people naturally have a kind of coordination and consistency in their bodies during activity. Many people use retouching software to control how they look. Others who feel uncomfortable with their bodies are in the habit of wearing social masks. We dress for formal and special occasions, and the Internet is one such occasion where the sense of beauty is becoming more and more extreme. This body that wants to be the whole, individual self but at the same time wants to conform to 'the they', reflects the existential crisis of contemporary people. We want to be unique, but deep down, we understand that everything we know is socioculturally instilled. Compared to photos on the Internet that overuse filters and ignore light, environment, and age, my work offers sitters another way of looking at themselves. There are many movements, traces and constructions in oil painting, and sitters are sometimes puzzled because they think that the images in their phones are true representations of themselves. The

artificial beauty provided by built-in photographic filters has changed the self-perception of contemporary people.

As an artist, during the creation of my work, my body is forgotten. Nietzsche talked about ‘children’ when he talked about the three stages of life in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2008). In this childlike state, people do things oblivious of themselves, and people who are so absorbed can go to a realm that ordinary people can’t reach, bewildering those around them. A child engaged in a game can be completely oblivious of him- or herself, but at the same time, they are their true self. Similarly, in forgetting themselves, a person may achieve a greater self.

As an artist, I am not non-existent in the process of active participation, but temporarily put on hold. There are no rules in this process; the artist’s body is in the active state of play, which is a method of self-expression, and a kind of freedom. Within the self-concept that dominates our current society, modern people love to talk about ‘being yourself’. But is this freedom? ‘Being at ease’, on the other hand, looks like ‘being yourself’, but is a much more positive concept. Modern people have an overwhelming desire to be free from bondage, to be themselves, but the problem about self is: we can’t be sure what this self is. We can, however, judge whether we feel at ease, and feeling at ease does not require separation from the situation we are in. On the contrary, freedom requires that we actively integrate into the field of action until becoming oblivious of ourselves. This does not mean denying our own existence, but finding a comfortable state of being, at one with ourselves and the environment. Nietzsche likens this state to dance; life is more beautiful when we are dancing than when we are just sitting or standing still.

Secondly, considering the positioning of space (fourfold, Taoism) for Dasein in the process of creating my works, I take a random, un-structured approach, and fit the large-scale canvases and my physical movements while painting into the constraints of the small space of student housing. I try to use my brushes to capture the reality of the moment, with no plan or expectations. The interception of the particular place and artistic act make the work meaningful, showing the ‘present’ that is hidden in everyday life. This method of creation is not like the pre-designed and careful arrangements of classical oil paintings, completely dominated by the artist. Nor is it like a modern photograph posted online, the satisfactory one being selected from a thousand selfies. It stands to reason that images on the Internet should be very random, as everyone can capture different perspectives; but today everyone is posting pictures of the same ideals of beauty (Berger, 2008). These photos on social media show the kind of life we want others to see, and those lives are mostly happy. On the contrary, my work has the environment, the background, the direction and the meaning. Through my movement in this space, I know where I am and where the sitters are located. My artworks are positioned within the concept of the ‘fourfold’ and Taoism, where things can have a place in the space, and through this, can acquire meaning.

Finally, I analysed the releasement of time in art and cyberspace. Art transforms contingency and randomness into a state of necessity and reality. In the creation of my work, the permanence and pre-existence of our inner self, privacy and uniqueness is based on and supported by the preservation of collective and shared permanence and pre-existence. The mind I share with the subject, and our private sharing of these unique moments together, builds our relationship. This persistence and pre-existence comes from the words we speak and hear that have been created in front of us. Our

art and culture are built on these foundations. This persistence and pre-existence, left over from an anonymous shared ancestral past, are also the life stories of my sitters. These stories also project a shared future that is elusive, inaccessible and impossible. But, through artworks, this future is always enduring and open. These life stories are open to multiple interpretations, and they make diversity a theme in the continuation of life history. If I use the concept of temporality to analyse each of my works in this series, when I paint my subjects, what I'm depicting in that current time and space is what I see of his/her past. Meanwhile, I'm already looking forward to my next brushstroke. However, there is an 'in-between', from one stroke to the next, and this in-between contains a kind of uncertainty and inefficiency of time and space at that moment. This vague gap contains the physical and mental states of me and the subject. This phenomenon reduces the known and unknown of this time and space to a sensory experience, which represents the fusion of thought and world, symbol and thing, cognition and perception.

These are all questions about the truth of existence in the contemporary world, using basic questioning to show some hidden unfoldings in the works of art. I think using face-to-face interviewing and painting techniques is an 'in-between' that can connect technology and humanity. I use art to question people, and to open our human existence to the essence of technology. This existence involves different cultures, skin colours and races, and in the creative process, I have tried to capture the essence of people. However, I have found that people do not necessarily have an essence, just certain qualities that jump out at certain moments. I took a few traits I saw from sitters and combined them, trying to create a simplified, symbolic version of the sitter; but it was impossible to represent this multi-faceted person in a portrait. My oil paintings can only convey part

of the mood. What I try to do is to make the viewer feel how the sitter looks at home in their daily life, instead of presenting a full and dramatic image using pre-designed lighting, background and action. I collect life stories and video indexes of different cultures in an ethnographic method of fieldwork, and I think the richer the data, the richer our understanding of people may become.

I think neither the material nor the form of the art is the point, but the point is Dasein's truth, which both obscures and reveals. There is no right or wrong way to use art as a method of disclosure in the contemporary world, and it is important that we know that this is as limited as any other method. Thus, in 1955, Heidegger turned to the development of a topology of existential truth in *On the Question of Being* (Heidegger, 1998). Our task as a Dasein truth seeker is to probe into the finitude of conditions that intertwine where truth occurs. The place where this Dasein happens is Being (Sein) in There (Da) – Being-there. To understand this question is not just to understand that things are things and the world is an inquiry into the world; more important is the need to understand the fundamental questions of Who are we? Where are we? Herein lies the central issue: we are not ourselves trapped in the world, we are a kind of intertwined field, or a fourfold.

This concept of the fourfold is also the basic spirit of Heidegger, and echoes the broader ideas about technology and art explored by *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935), while technology and art are both creative fields, they also have a kind of 'knowing' (*wissen*) in them. Heidegger believed that to know means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing (Heidegger, 1971, p.57). It is also mentioned in Taoist thought that 'seeing' and 'knowing' have a sense of what is present, a state of awareness. This

is also the state I am in when making my oil paintings. This kind of ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ is not just a theoretical visualisation. As I said in the first part of this thesis, it is about how we see others and ourselves and how people are driven to implicitly practice direction and principles. We may only live in a repetitive daily routine, yet we are aware of the world around us, even if this awareness is submerged in the background of daily life.

Here, art provides a place of refuge where we can know that we have to be in the world and why we are in the world. Between one stroke of art and the next, I try to depict Dasein’s being-in-the-world in this inextricable relationship between the consciousness of philosophy and the reality of everyday life. This is different from the traditional metaphysics, which pursues absolute truth and ignores the limited horizon of its own truth system. This disclosure method of art both reveals and conceals, while disclosing and detecting more concealed directions. The truth of art is dwelling in the world, above the earth, between Dasein and Being. In my paintings I am asking about the ‘in-between’ while comprehending enclavement when the sitter opens up in front of me. In this ‘ab-ground’ of enclavement opening, there is no eternal foundation, but at the same time we find the original human being, where truth is constantly occurring, grounding the whole of human meaning. My artworks hope to show the link between the background of metaphysics itself and the finiteness of each individual, so that the answers all return to the question. It is also a process of how one goes through constant questioning in an endless life, and this artistic activity is a cyclic activity that goes back and forth between setting a question and finding an answer. Through this, I aim to make the characters in my portraits look more like themselves, more like themselves than the people they were or will be – to find their truth.

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